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**UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM**

**CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF  
NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN HONG  
KONG: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY**

**By**

**Chu Chau Kan, Ivory**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctorate in Education**

**October 2009**

## **ABSTRACT**

Since its inception, the attrition rate of teachers in the Native English Teachers (NETs) scheme in Hong Kong has been very high. Though the introduction of financial incentives has reduced this slightly, the problem remains, and this thesis explores an alternative explanation for the high attrition, in the field of cross-cultural adjustment. The thesis argues that the effectiveness of the NET scheme is affected by the extent to which issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed sufficiently, and that the high attrition rate can be explained, in part, by neglect of issues in cross-cultural adjustment, both in terms of the sojourners and of the host culture. A literature review indicates that cross-cultural adjustment has many different dimensions, and that levels of culture shock and cross-cultural adjustment depend, in part, on individuals' characteristics. The thesis reports a small-scale qualitative investigation into the experiences of NETs in Hong Kong, seen through different lenses and theories of cross-cultural adjustment, and using a grounded theory approach to data analysis. The empirical data gathered reveal a complex, differentiated and individualized view of cross-cultural adjustment, and that it changes in individuals over time. Cross-cultural adjustment is also seen to apply to host cultures and service providers as well as to the sojourners themselves. Serious shortcomings are found in the provision of suitable preparation, induction, training and ongoing support provided for NETs in Hong Kong in terms of cross-cultural adjustment, and recommendations are made for interventions with the sojourners, the schools and the Hong Kong government's NETs scheme and associated training programmes.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to improve the English language proficiency of students in Hong Kong, in 1998 the Hong Kong government introduced the “Native-speaking English Teachers” (NET) scheme to the secondary schools. The scheme was extended to the primary schools in 2002. After several years of implementation, the scheme received severe criticism from local educationists and schools, which included a lack of obvious evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the scheme in enhancing the language proficiency of students despite the colossal investment. There were also negative comments from students towards the communication and teaching approaches of some NETs and failure in conducting teamwork between NETs and local English teachers (Lee, 1996; Gibb, 2003a). Meanwhile the NET scheme also attracted several negative reports on its consistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining NETs (Forestier and Hui, 2001; Ng, 2002).

In 2005, the Legislative Council of Hong Kong (Hong Kong Legislative Council Paper No. CB(2)109/05-06(01)) reported that 49 per cent and 46 per cent of NETS in Hong Kong secondary and primary schools respectively would not renew their contracts in 2005 (subsequently the exact figure turned out to be 49 per cent and 53 per cent respectively: Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005b), with 44 per cent and 39 per cent attrition in 2003-4, and 48 per cent attrition in secondary schools in 2002-3 and 40 per cent attrition in 2001-2. The attrition rate from 2004/2005 to 2007/2008 can be found below (Tables 1.1 and 1.2). Although the percentages have dropped overall since 2004 (particularly after the Hong Kong government introduced an increased financial incentive in 2005), they are still high and they refuse to fall greatly, indeed they increase slightly from 2005/6. Having over a quarter of NET’s contract non-renewal is a very high attrition rate. This suggests that, though the government’s financial incentives scheme in 2005/6 may have made a slight improvement, however, financial benefits alone do not solve the problem. There may be other reasons, and this thesis suggests that one of these might concern issues of cross-cultural adjustment, and the thesis explores this.

Table 1.1: Non-renewal of NETs contracts, 2004/2008

Year	Primary NET		Secondary NET	
	No. of NETs who did not renew their contracts	% of contract non-renewal of NETs	No. of NETs who did not renew their contracts	% of contract non-renewal of NETs
2004/05	101	46	100	54
2005/06	40	32	72	25
2006/07	53	23	51	29
2007/08	67	24	68	28

*Source:* Hong Kong Education Bureau (2009)

Table 1.2: Number of NETs recruited through EDB, 2004/08

Year	Primary NET	Secondary NET	Total of NETs recruited through EDB
2004/05	149	68	217
2005/06	124	70	194
2006/07	64	51	115
2007/08	60	48	108

*Source:* Hong Kong Education Bureau (2009)

The Legislative Council (2005) reported that:

Representatives of NESTA considered that the entire NET remuneration package was becoming less attractive in the light of various factors including salary adjustments in line with the civil services, rising living costs in Hong Kong, changing currency relativities and competitive offers for professional native-speaking English teachers in other places. In particular, they considered that the downward adjustment of the special allowance for NETs from \$13,000 to \$10,500 in mid-May 2005 was not in line with the rising rental costs in recent years.

(Legislative Council, 2005a: 3)

Indeed the Council reported that:

Members in general found the projected turnover rate of NETs in primary and secondary schools unacceptable. In view of the resources required for the recruitment of NETs and the contribution of NETs to the upgrading of English proficiency of local students, they considered that EMB should examine the causes for the high turnover rate and take remedial measures to improve the situation. Some members, however, considered that EMB should also evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the Scheme in terms of its effect on upgrading English proficiency of local students.

*(ibid.: 3)*

The reasons given, of remuneration and finances, and the financial incentive scheme and special allowance introduced in 2005 Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005b: 4) did not stem the outflow of NETS. The Council (Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005a.: 6) states that another problem might be the duration of the contract:

The Administration considered that an initial turnover rate of 30% to 40% was acceptable for Primary NETs as they were recruited from overseas countries on the basis of a two-year renewable contract. According to exit interviews conducted by EMB, most NETs had left the service for professional or personal reasons, rather than unsatisfactory relationship with co-workers or school management.

(Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005a: 6)

The Hong Kong Legislative Council's report (2005b) indicated that:

The survey results show that for NETs who said they would renew contracts, job satisfaction was the primary reason underpinning the choice, followed by attractive remuneration package and good working and support conditions in schools. For those who might not renew, the primary reason was that the remuneration package was not attractive enough, followed by insufficient job satisfaction, moving to other professional opportunities and lack of support from schools. Hence, attractiveness of the NET package and

job satisfaction are the two major factors affecting whether a NET will continue in the scheme.

(Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005b: 2)

Indeed the same report indicated that an overall attrition rate of 71 per cent was recorded for those NETs serving for six years, and that:

The above indicates that NETs with up to 2 or 4 years of experience, i.e. those who are about to enter a second or third contract, is the category we are losing most NETs. This pattern is not educationally desirable. When a NET has come to teach in Hong Kong, the 1<sup>st</sup> school year may be the hardest year for the NET and the school to accommodate each other. If the NET and local teachers are working well through the 2<sup>nd</sup> year and onwards, it will be a great loss if such hard-earned experience drains away when the NET decides to leave after only 2 years. Schools will also find it difficult to accommodate a new NET every 2 years.

(*ibid.*: 3)

The same document indicated that attrition might be due to financial matters, poor holiday arrangement, insensitive school management, no promotion prospects, lack of continuing professional development provision, and that:

professional collaboration between local teachers and NETs has room for improvement. This is particularly so in some school contexts where NETs feel they lack support from the school managements and EMB. There is also some discontent regarding matters of school administration which are entirely within the responsibility of the school management.

(*ibid.*: 8)

Other reasons for attrition are given in some NETs' blogs as the examination pressure in the Hong Kong education system, workload, meetings conducted in Cantonese, and pedagogical requirements that sit uncomfortably with NETs own views of 'good teaching'.

Importantly for this thesis, the document reported that ‘we must stress that not all the above reflect administrative wrong-doing. The school culture in Hong Kong is very different from that in the home countries of NETs’ (*ibid.*: 9). It is on the cultural aspects and cross-cultural aspects of NETs working in Hong Kong that this thesis focuses. Indeed in 2007, the Hong Kong Legislative Council reported that ‘the cultural clash in some incidents was amplified when schools applied fair treatment mechanically and inflexibly to all teachers including NETs’ (Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2007: 3).

Many reasons could account for the perceived ineffectiveness of the NET scheme to recruit and retain NETs, which could not be solved simply by financial concerns. As discussed below, evaluations of previous native-speaking English teachers’ schemes indicate that the problems may be associated (among other factors) with the acculturation of NETs in Hong Kong: Intercultural relationship has revolutionized globalization and the world can now be described as a new transcultural community (Agar, 2000). The traditional definitions of culture in terms of strict division on national boundaries may not hold as the population of most countries has become fluid. There may be perceived differences as well as similarities between cultures. Irrespective of the judgments about the NET scheme, it would be a shame if the NET scheme failed on the basis of cultural adjustment. This thesis investigates the cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs in Hong Kong and their responses in a culturally different environment from their native environment, so that insights can be gained on the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs to serve as a focus for a more comprehensive review of the NET Scheme in the future, for the improvement of its effectiveness (including its cost-effectiveness) for the benefits of both teachers and students.

## **1.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND**

It may be surprising to learn that native-speaking English teachers have been involved in Hong Kong for a period of 150 years during the colonial period in Hong Kong’s history (Sweeting, 1990). English speaking educators firstly came to Hong Kong to spread Christianity. Later, those educators felt it necessary to provide decent education

for the local residents to enhance their standard of living. Consequently, many schools were set up by the religious organizations.

From the early beginnings up to 1980s, many local schools employed native-speaking English teachers to enhance the teaching and learning of English on an individual basis. In 1982, a Visiting Panel set up by the Hong Kong government to investigate the education standard considered “localization” to be the main reason for the deterioration in the standard of English in the schools. It recommended a systematic recruitment of expatriate teachers for Hong Kong schools.

The recommendations of the Visiting Panel stirred up widespread interest in the community. The Education Commission approved that each local school be given the provision to recruit up to three expatriates. Later, the Education Commission Report No. 1 (Hong Kong Government Printer, 1984) recommended that schools be encouraged to employ “locally available native English speakers” instead. The expatriate recruitment scheme was extended to cover a wider range of schools to enhance the quality of teaching and learning of English.

The Expatriate English Language Teachers Pilot Scheme (EELTPS) began in August 1987 with the recruitment of 30 expatriate English language teachers (EELTs), aiming at providing EELTs to teach in a wide range of teaching situations in a representative cross-section of schools (British Council, 1989).

Both quantitative and qualitative measures had been conducted for the evaluation of the EELTPS. The evaluation suggested that the Scheme had a positive effect on English language learning in the Hong Kong secondary schools generally and that educationally the continued employment of expatriate English teachers was viable (British Council, 1989; Boyle, 1997).

EELTPS was a two-year pilot scheme completed by the end of the 1989 school year. The systematic involvement of native English teachers in Hong Kong secondary schools was continued in the form of a modified scheme known as the Expatriate English Language Teachers Modified Scheme (EELTMS) (Educational Research Establishment, 1991). Evaluation of the scheme was also conducted (British Council, 1989). It was found that Principals and Panel Chairpersons were generally pleased



with the performance of the EELTMs in delivering their teaching and on-teaching duties.

### **1.3 THE NATIVE-SPEAKING ENGLISH TEACHER (NET) SCHEME**

To address the concern about the continued decline of language proficiency among the youngsters in Hong Kong as highlighted in Education Commission Report Number 6 (Education Commission, 1996: 18), another attempt was made to recruit native English teachers systematically in 1998. The fourth Education Commission report cited the findings of EELTPS evaluation as a justification for continuing the scheme on a more permanent basis in 1991 (Education Commission, 1990). In the sixth Education Commission report published in 1996, a Native-speaking English Teacher (NET) Scheme was recommended as a stopgap measure to address the perceived problem of a shortfall in the numbers of trained English teachers in schools.

Before an adequate number of local teachers are trained, schools should be encouraged to employ on local terms more native English teachers who are qualified English language teachers, to teach the subject.

(Education  
Commission, 1996: 4)

The NET scheme was inaugurated in September 1998 and was firstly confined to secondary schools and special schools in the secondary sector to enable them to introduce native English teachers into their primary schools from 1998 to 2000. A total of 388 teachers had been recruited for the 1998/1999 school year and the number increased to 440 for 1999/2000 and 441 for 2000/2001. Up till 2008, there were some 1,000 NETs working in Hong Kong.

As financial commitment involved in the NET scheme is substantial, and it was regarded as an implicit threat to the job security of existing local English teachers, the scheme has been kept under close scrutiny by the community and the teaching professionals ever since its introduction (Gibb, 2003b; 2003c). Moreover, a growing body of literature has questioned the implicit assumptions underlying the employment of language teachers on the basis of first language or racial origin (Kachru, 1986;

Rampton, 1990; Medgyes, 1992; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Widdowson, 1994, 1999; Boyle, 1997; Cook, 1999). To assess the cost-effectiveness of the NET Scheme, the Hong Kong Institute of Education was commissioned by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) to conduct an evaluation: the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme (MENETS) between November 1998 and November 2000.

The objectives of the evaluation focused on identifying “the nature of teaching and learning approach adopted by NETs, the effects of the introduction of NETs on the social and professional life of the schools involved, and the effect of the NET scheme on student language learning in terms of the English language proficiency and attitudes towards English among pupils in those schools” (MENETS, 2000: 18). It listed a number of flaws but also voiced support for the scheme.

However, heated debates on the success and failures of the scheme continued. The government and the Professional Teachers’ Union (PTU) defended the NET scheme after several educators suggested it should be a target for spending cuts, during an education panel meeting in the Legislative Council in 2005 (Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005a: 2). The scheme continued to be a hot issue of debate in the education sector in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the government unveiled plans to double the number of native-speaking English teachers in primary schools within three years, committing yet more resources into the controversial scheme (Hong Kong Legislative Council, 2005b: 2).

## **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE NET SCHEME**

The objectives of the NET Scheme can be identified by searching through the following documents published by the HKSAR government:

1. Education Department: Visiting Panel (1982) *A Perspective on Education in Hong Kong: Report by a Visiting Panel*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
2. Education Commission (1984) *Education Commission Report No. 1*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
3. Education Department (1989) *Report of the Working Group on Language Improvement Measures*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.

4. Education Commission (1996) *Education Commission Report No. 6*. Hong Kong: Government Printer.
5. The Chief Executive's Policy Address (1997) Hong Kong SAR Government Printer.
6. Education Department (1997) *Finance Committee Agenda Item paper for Finance Committee Meeting on 21 November 1997*. Hong Kong SAR: Education Department.
7. Education Department (2000) *Net-working: Examples of Good Professional Practice within the NET Scheme*. Hong Kong: Education Department, Government Printer.

The first objective was to expose students to native English speakers to compensate for the low standard of local teachers.

We observed such low standards of English in . . . teachers. . . . most teachers are by no means fluent. . . . policy ought to be amended so that children in their first years of schooling might be exposed to native English teachers.

(Report of the Visiting Panel, 1982, III.I.9: 27)

native speaker teachers of English would help to raise the quality of the teaching and learning of English in schools...

(Report of the Working Group on Language Improvement Measures, 1989, 3.5.3: 53-54)

Secondly, NETs were employed as resource teachers to enhance English teaching and learning in a Chinese education environment, so as to raise the city's competitiveness internationally.

NETs will act as English language resource teachers in the schools. They will assist in school-based teacher development programme and help foster an enabling environment for students to speak English and practice their oral skills.

(Item for Finance Committee 21 November 1997  
(FCR(97-98)63): 2)

The key roles of the NET are: to enhance the English language proficiency of individual students; to demonstrate contemporary approaches to the teaching and learning of English in their work with students; and to share professional ideas with their fellow English teachers.

(Education Department, 2000: 33)

The chief curriculum development officer with the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB, formerly known as EMB) in charge of the extended NET scheme launched in 1998, said that the government's aims were to provide an "authentic environment for children to learn English, develop children's interest in learning the language, help local teachers develop innovative learning and teaching methods and materials, and disseminate good practices." The expatriate teachers, who have been called 'agents of change', were expected to teach English and carry out the task of reform (South China Morning Post, 2002).

In summary, three major objectives were set for the NET scheme, to enable native-speaking English teachers to enhance the teaching of English by:

- a) acting as English language resource persons in the schools;
- b) assisting in school-based teacher development;
- c) helping to foster an enabling environment for students to speak English and practise their oral skills.

## **1.5 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF NETs**

Meanwhile, there are concerns that the English standard of the local English teachers keeps falling. According to a news report, the results of language benchmark tests for teachers were again raising alarm about the standards of English taught at Hong Kong's schools as more failed than in any previous tests, with as many as 70 per cent failing the written test (South China Morning Post, 2003a). The results seemed to affirm the importance of the Native-speaking English Teachers (NET) scheme in exposing students to high standards of the language and for supporting teachers (South China Morning Post, 2003a). Yet, schools are consistently anxious about finding enough English-language teachers (South China Morning Post, 2005a; 2005b).

However, as indicated above, the scheme has drawn negative criticisms from the teachers and students ever since it was launched; many teaching professionals remain skeptical of the effectiveness of the scheme and some have even grown resentful of the NETs. Opinions reflected on the newspapers showed that some criticized NETs as being greedy and that “NETs sign petition to increase allowance” (South China Morning Post, 2007); there were public concerns over the qualifications of NETs working in local schools, some local teachers queried that “just because they are native teachers does not necessarily qualify them..... to teach English.” (Gibb, 2003c). NETs were sometimes perceived as irresponsible teachers as they “grumble too much”, “are rather lazy”, “don’t want to work long hours” (South China Morning Post, 2003b); and “many school groups questioned the value of the NET scheme...and NET teachers’ workload is not any heavier than that of local teachers, but they are paid much more.” (Hui, 2003). Local teachers were also worried about their jobs due to the presence of the NETs (South China Morning Post, 2005c). On the other hand, NETs complained about poor working conditions, uncompetitive salaries, inability to fulfil their role as key change agents due to flaws in the scheme, and unprofessionalism of the resources administrators directing the NET scheme (Heron, 2005; South China Morning Post, 2005d).

Despite the colossal investment in the scheme, there were few official surveys on the effectiveness of the NET scheme to enhance students’ English proficiency, and the results were ambiguous. In addition to the MENETS conducted between November 1998 and November 2000 mentioned above, a longitudinal study was funded by the Education and Manpower Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Government entitled “Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme for primary schools in Hong Kong”. It was conducted between 2004 and 2006 by scholars from the University of Melbourne, the Open University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The objectives of the study were to “determine the effectiveness of the primary NET (PNET) scheme, measure proficiency of Hong Kong students at multiple formative stages of development over three years and examine the relationships of the PNET scheme and how it is implemented, to monitor and advise on changes in proficiency and attitudes over time in terms of value added analyses” (Griffin & Woods, *et al.*, 2005: v). In the conclusion, it stated, “there appears to have been some gains in English proficiency as a result of the PNET scheme. Whether this was sufficient return on the considerable investment is not known. More than 600

million dollars is a vast sum to invest in language development...the evaluation has indicated that the return can be improved” (*ibid.*: 196).

There are a few research theses on the NET scheme written as partial fulfillment of requirements for the Degree of Master or Doctorate of Education. For example, “A comparison of the conception of teaching English of Native-speaking and local teachers in Hong Kong primary schools” (Man, 2002) aimed at comparing the English teaching conceptions between native-speaking and local teachers. It identified significant cultural differences between the NETs and the local English teachers in the conceptions and teaching methodologies. There is another paper by Van Deven Teresa conducted in 2006 entitled “The Native-English teaching programme in Hong Kong: a critical ethnography” aiming at finding out why has NETs’ authority maintained its stronghold within English language education in Hong Kong. “Factors affecting NET satisfaction and attrition: a case of three native English teachers in Hong Kong” (Butt, 2007) focused on the differences in the expectations of teaching in Hong Kong and the reality when the NETs began their teaching here. The study reported that all the informants found unexpected problems with school administration, staff and students. They thought the school principals too dictatorial and dominant, they found the local teaching staff too subtle, passive while also overloaded, the students they taught were largely of low abilities and had disciplinary problems.

Further, despite spending substantial resources to recruit the NETs, the government seems to have difficulties in maintaining the body of NETs to stay teaching in Hong Kong. It was consistently reported in the newspapers (South China Morning Post, 1998; So, 1999; Forestier and Hui, 2001) that a number of NETs were set to quit after their teaching contracts finished. According to the statistics released by the Education Bureau on their website in 2005, some 53% of the NETs left before their first contract finished, or after serving only one contract period. The reasons the NETs gave for their quitting mainly involved lack of job satisfaction caused by factors such as poor language skills among unmotivated students, lack of support from local teachers, difficulty in adapting to local teaching environment.

In addition, Hong Kong is also facing a severe worldwide competition in recruiting native English teachers (South China Morning Post, 2005a; 2005b). Despite the gloomy labour market, seven per cent of English-language teachers at secondary

schools – 321 people – quit their jobs in 2000, according to the Education Department. The turnover rate was the highest among teachers (Ng 2002). Subsequently, educators were warning of a shortage of native English teachers (NET) due to a high turnover and increased demand coupled with problems attracting new blood from overseas. The total number of NETs needed by the school system has increased and that is making it more difficult to fill the posts. Clearly there appears to be a problem with retention of NETs, and, whilst the Hong Kong government has taken several steps to address these (e.g. through remuneration and financial incentives), this has not solved the problem. It appears that there are several factors contributing to high attrition rates, and this thesis explores one set of factors: cross-cultural adjustment.

## **1.6 CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF NETs**

Davies, who was responsible for the quantitative analyses in the EELTPS evaluation, suggested that there may be advantages to putting resources into training local teachers as an alternative and he recommended further research to investigate “the sense of local attachment and continuity in the Hong Kong culture which by definition are not available to expatriates” (British Council, 1989: 182). He saw the recommendation as a “veiled reference to problems associated with the acculturation (or lack of it) of the expatriate teachers” (British Council, 1989: 183). It drew attention to the need to understand more about the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs.

The Monitoring and Evaluation of the Native-speaking English Teacher Scheme (MENETS) identified that the NETs seemed to have “a unique role to play in apprenticing pupils into the culture of L2 speaking and acting by modeling naturally how target L2 speakers speak and act...” (MENETS :113). However, the findings of the MENETS indicated that one of the reasons for NET dissatisfaction was “lack of a sense of belonging due to cultural differences” (p.105). It also mentioned that all NETs interviewed had experienced different degrees of relationship problems with their students because of “personality and culture clashes between the NETs and the students” (MENETS: 105). Some NETs pointed out that as there was only one NET in each school, they could only conform to the local culture eventually. “There is often less NET effect on the school than school effect on the NET” (MENETS: 106). Some students, particularly low-ability high form students, commented on the “insensitivity of the NET to their learning difficulties” (MENETS: 105).

As NETs are frontline teachers, the performances of the students will be directly affected by the quality of their teaching, which in turn may be affected by a number of factors. It should be noted that unlike the local teachers who were born and raised in Hong Kong, the NETs have to face the challenges of living and working in a culturally different environment. Cross-cultural interaction of the NETs with the locals should be an issue of concern as often times clashes between expatriate teachers and local colleagues resulted from misunderstandings caused by conflicting cultural and pedagogic expectations. (Gibb, 2003c; 2003d). Gibb said school heads should be given 'cross-cultural training' in how westerners work, and led to expect that NET teachers would often use classroom methods uncommon in local schools. "Many of the problems that come up happen because of a lack of cultural understanding," he noted (*ibid.*). The problems and costs resulted from expatriates failure to adjust in cross-culturally different environments can be huge according to prior research in this area (Selmer, 1999; 2000a).

Globalization is thought to be the key to organizational success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Tung, 1987). As a consequence of these changes in the global economy, businesses are increasingly relying on expatriate assignments to facilitate the globalization process (Tung, 1987; Ronen, 1989; Scullion, 1991). Research (Black and Gregersen, 1990; Selmer, 1999) indicated that adjustment to the foreign culture is a critical factor in determining expatriate retention and performance. Empirical studies have shown that maladjustment not only leads to early return, but also causes job strain and adversely affects job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance (e.g., Black & Stephen, 1989; Caligiuri, 1996; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001).

In summary, high turnover of NETs, huge public money investment coupled with a lack of evidence to justify the effectiveness of the NET scheme on students' English learning, have led to severe criticisms of the scheme by the public and also dissatisfaction from the NETs themselves. It appears that the NET scheme is not fulfilling its potential or is not operating as effectively as it could. However, despite the few formal government commissioned surveys mentioned above, key aspects of the NET scheme (e.g. cross-cultural adjustment issues) are still under-researched, despite its huge cost and educational significance. Moreover, in those formal surveys, it is apparent that the policy implementation has not addressed the significance of



cross-cultural adjustments in contributing to the effectiveness of the scheme. This thesis takes one aspect of the several factors influencing the effectiveness of the NETs scheme in Hong Kong. The hypothesis in this thesis is that the effectiveness of the NET scheme is affected by the extent to which issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed sufficiently. The thesis is supported through the grounded theory of cross-cultural adjustment that is undertaken in this thesis, and it suggests why, from the perspective of cross-cultural adjustments, the NET scheme is not working to its maximum potential.

## **1.7 OBJECTIVES, ORIGINALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The negative effects of cross-cultural interactions have been well documented in research (e.g. Ward *et al.*, 2001). In the case of the NETs who intend to stay in another country for a temporary duration, their experiences may lead to intercultural stress. Stressful experiences may have affected the abilities of the NETs to perform their teaching roles effectively. This thesis investigates the cross cultural adjustments of the NETs in Hong Kong and their ways of responding in a culturally different environment. Currently this topic is under reported in research studies on the NETS scheme in Hong Kong.

This research is important for several reasons. Firstly, the topic of cross-cultural adjustment in the NET scheme has been under-researched in Hong Kong. Only a few studies have been conducted officially or unofficially on the NET scheme overall, and, in fact, their objectives and foci differ from this research, as mentioned above. There was a study to monitor and evaluate the secondary schools Native English-speaking Teachers (NET) scheme by the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) in 1998. As mentioned, its focus was not to understand the NETs' cross-cultural adjustments and responses in Hong Kong, which may have a significant effect on their work performance. Moreover, the research funded by the EMB by the HKSAR on the PNET scheme, mentioned above, focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the scheme in primary schools. While the findings confirmed some gains in students' English proficiency due to the PNET scheme, it could not justify the investment commissioned on the scheme but confirmed that returns on investment in the scheme could be improved were it to be better managed.

There are some other studies on the NET scheme. One was a qualitative study entitled “A comparison of the conceptions of teaching English of native speaking and local teachers in Hong Kong primary schools” (Man, 2002). Another was a study entitled “Factors affecting ‘NET’ satisfaction and attrition” (Butt, 2007) focusing on “the differences in the expectation of teaching here and the reality they found when they started to work” (Butt, 2007: 2). The purposes of these two M.Ed. theses, as reflected in their titles, were again different from the research reported in this thesis.

Secondly, given the increasing problems of recruiting and retaining NETs in Hong Kong and expatriates for international careers worldwide (cf. Forster & Johnsen, 1996; Harvey, 1997), it is essential to explore and understand to what extent these cross-cultural professionals adapt. Trying to adjust to the new cultural environment can be a stressful experience and not everyone is successful in this arduous task (Oberg, 1960). Research on expatriate professionals has revealed that premature return rates are significant and that each failure gives rise to substantial direct and indirect costs (Hechanova *et. al.*, 2003; Ramsey, 2005). Furthermore, a notable share of expatriate professionals who stay on are regarded as ineffective by their organizations and those underperforming staff incur large direct and indirect costs (Hilltrop & Janssens, 1990; Black & Gregersen, 1991). One may suggest that expatriates who cannot adjust but remain on their assignments and fail to perform adequately, could be even more damaging to the organization concerned than those who return prematurely.

Thirdly, while there is extensive research investigating intercultural adaptation in western countries, particularly in the United States, there are comparatively fewer studies investigating the adaptation of westerners in Asian countries. For western expatriates, China, particularly its more internationalized and developed cities such as Hong Kong, is becoming a more and more relevant choice of destination for international assignment. While the primary focus of this research is on NETs, the findings may contribute to providing more understanding of the cross-cultural experiences and responses of the westerners in popular Asian cities such as Hong Kong and hopefully the information will provide more insights for employers and employees to better prepare and equip the expatriates to function more effectively in these cities.

The originality of the topic is that very limited research, formal or informal, has been done in this topic in Hong Kong, in particular through the eyes of the participants and which has attempted to look at the issue through the lens of cross-cultural adjustment, as well as to obtain a wide embrace of characteristics of the NET population. By using a grounded theory approach (i.e. a very robust methodology for data analysis and theory generation) to study the phenomenon, this research identifies the reasons for the gap between policy intention and policy implementation, i.e. it focuses on the processes instead of solely on the outcomes.

The significance of this research lies in terms of its objectives:

- To look at the reasons why policies for NETs in Hong Kong might not work as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention;
- To apply theories of cross-cultural adjustment to explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong and in order to explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively;
- To make recommendations for interventions to improve the operations of the NETs scheme;
- To give insights into the key issue of cross-cultural adjustment, from the points of views of the participants, in order to increase the success of policy implementation;
- To indicate how this major and expensive government policy initiative might fulfill its potential by taking account of a neglected area heretofore (i.e. cross-cultural adjustment).

If the scheme is to work effectively, then it has to take greater account of the issue of cross-cultural adjustments of the NET teachers and to look at the situation in which they are placed, and through their own eyes. This research is conducted in order to give an explanation for why the turnover rate is so high and how this can be ameliorated.

The next chapter reviews literature on cross-cultural adjustment, including a brief discussion of the impact of globalization on the definition of culture and inter-cultural relationships. The types of immigrants, dimensions of cross-cultural contact, and

different theories of cross-cultural adjustment would then be critically reviewed. The outcomes of cross-cultural contact, possible responses to alien cultures, and factors that might affect the process will also be examined.

The literature review serves as a springboard into questions that are asked in the interview and provides topics and themes for investigation in the data analysis, to enable comparison of findings of literature and this research.

## **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction, giving background information on the history and development of the native-speaking English teachers (NET) scheme from the colonial period to the present period after Hong Kong was reunified with mainland China. It also highlights the problems and criticisms of the NET scheme, the objectives, originality and significance of this research.

The second chapter reviews literature on cross-cultural adjustments. It discusses conceptions of culture, which is particularly controversial in this age when globalization may have revolutionized the cultural boundaries among countries. It explores research and literature debate on the theories of cross-cultural contacts, adjustments and possible outcomes. Ways of responding to culturally differences are also examined.

The third chapter discusses the methodologies of the empirical research and the research design. It gives the rationale for conducting this research from the ethnographic approach, generating grounded theory. It explains the essence of grounded theory and essential steps that need to be taken in the approach.

The fourth chapter comprises data analysis. From the interview scripts, information is transcribed and data are coded and analyzed according to the procedures prescribed for grounded theory. Core and key categories are identified from the data and discussions of the data are undertaken with reference to the literature reviewed in chapter two. Validity and reliability of the research are also examined.

The fifth chapter presents the main findings of the research. It discusses the possible implications of the research for theory, research and practice. Limitations of the research are also discussed.

Lastly, the final chapter conducts an overview of the research, reviews the objectives and the research findings and draws main conclusions.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews research related to cross-cultural adjustment. It was suggested at the end of the previous chapter that one of the problems giving rise to high attrition and low retention rates of NETs in Hong Kong may be the neglect of significant aspects of cross-cultural adjustment that the sojourners and the hosts have to make. This chapter sets the scene for the empirical investigation into this problem later in the thesis, by establishing here the construct validity of the issues in hand, through a literature review. The chapter indicates a range of different dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment, and argues that both external factors (e.g. cultural, institutional, societal) and internal factors (e.g. personal, personality-related, emotional, cognitive) combines to render the process of cultural adjustment potentially highly stressful, and that these need to be addressed both before and during the sojourners' stay in the host country.

The chapter starts with a brief statement of definitions of culture, in order to contextualize an understanding of the experiences of NETs in a culturally different environment. Nowadays globalization has revolutionized intercultural relationships and the world has become a new "transcultural community" (McLuhan *et al.*, 1968; Agar, 2002). As a consequence, the traditional definitions of culture may not hold, as the combined populations of most countries have become fluid. However, a study of the literature suggests that conceptualizing culture is still meaningful and helpful for understanding how culture can act as a perceptual framework for cross-cultural sojourners to make sense of the world, and can act as an arbiter of choices about particular behavior as reported by many participants in the ensuing empirical research in this thesis. Many talked of their experiences in terms of cultural difference or 'patterns of difference' as observed by Shaules (2007).

The chapter then examines literature on the types of immigrants and dimensions of cross-cultural contact. Different theories of cross-cultural adjustment are critically reviewed, including process theories, personality based theories, stress-coping theories

and interactive theories. These are followed by a study of the outcomes of cross-cultural contact, possible responses to what may be perceived as alien cultures, and a review of factors that might affect the process of cross-cultural adjustment.

The literature review provides guidance on issues to be addressed in the interviews, raises topics and possible themes that might emerge in the data analysis, and sets the ground for a comparison of findings of literature and this research.

The purpose of a literature review in a grounded theory study is to inform the data collection and research study without altering the perspectives of the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). One of the principles of grounded theory is that the data are gathered and analyzed continuously so that the resulting model or theory is “grounded” in the real data (Gall *et al.*, 1996). Strauss and Corbin (*op cit.*) stated that it is unnecessary to review all of the existing literature in advance, because new categories may emerge from the gathering of original data. The review of related strains of literature helps to develop concepts and informs the data collection process without directly altering the development of the emerging theory. In grounded theory, the data and the theory often speak for themselves.

The chapter identifies and reviews relevant issues and literature in the field, identifies the different dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment and migrant behaviour, establishes the importance of the theoretical lenses being used in the thesis, indicates the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, links macro and micro levels of analysis in the field under investigation, and identifies factors that may affect cross-cultural adjustment.

The chapters develop a cumulative argument in several stages. *Firstly* an initial definition of culture indicates that it is a multi-dimensional and complex concept, and that several factors impact on a sojourner’s cross-cultural adjustment. The nature of the factors impacting on cross-cultural adjustment can be seen in Figure 2.1.

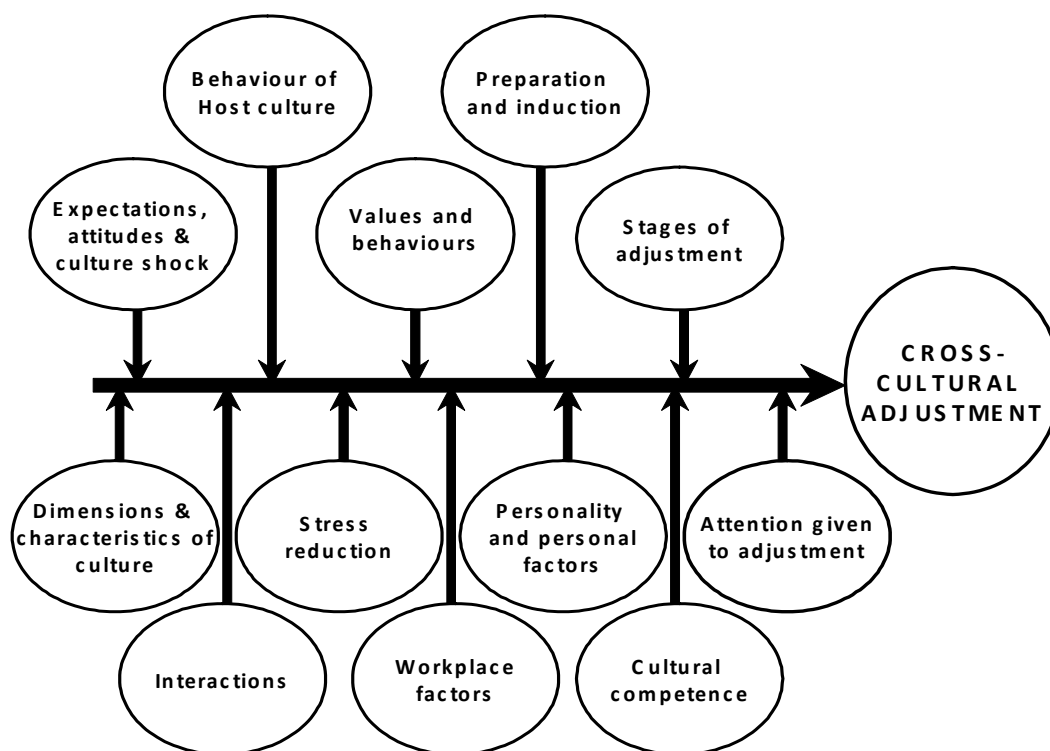


Figure 2.1: Factors affecting cross-cultural adjustment

Given this, it is not surprising that the likelihood of problems of cross-cultural adjustment is high, as there are so many places where differences in aspects of culture might occur.

*Secondly*, the chapter indicates that some research has suggested that there are major differences between countries, for example between East and West. Whilst criticisms have been raised of such studies (e.g. conceptually, methodologically, substantively), nevertheless it was suggested that, whilst they may not reliably indicate unitary differences between countries, nevertheless they indicate some major criteria in which differences may be found between cultures (if not by countries). The chapter indicates that there are some fundamental cultural orientations that may be different between the sojourner and the host culture. It also suggests that both parties have to adjust to each other for cross-cultural adjustment to occur: the host culture has to be prepared to take account of the sojourner's cultural background, just as the sojourner has to take account of the host culture. How far cross-cultural adjustment is smooth for both parties (host and sojourner) is argued to be a function of the expectations of both parties and the personality of the sojourner. For example, if the personality of the



sojourner is very different from that of the people in the host culture then difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment might occur.

*Thirdly*, the chapter argues that problems of cross-cultural adjustment may occur if due attention to the processes of cultural adjustment (in both the sojourner and the host) are neglected. The chapter argues for the significance of addressing issues in cross-cultural adjustment if the problems of attrition and retention in NETs in Hong Kong are to be attenuated. In turn it argues that to address cross-cultural adjustment requires attention to very many aspects of the phenomenon. This sets up the empirical research, in which issues in cross-cultural adjustment are explored through the eyes of the sojourners.

*Fourthly*, the chapter argues that cross-cultural adjustment can be a highly stressful experience for sojourners, and that, whilst it is possible to identify particular stressors (e.g. workplace factors, cultural fit, culture shock, personality and personal factors, emotional and cognitive states, attitudes, intercultural competence, levels of preparation and ongoing support), external factors in the host culture are mediated by the personal make-up of each individual sojourners. Hence, the argument is advanced that, if cross-cultural adjustment is to be understood, then it has to be studied through the eyes and experiences of the particular sojourners in question. This gives support to the nature of the empirical investigation, which conducts in-depth qualitative interviews with sojourners, identifying the key issues in their (the sojourners') own terms, i.e. *emic* rather than *etic* analysis.

## **2.2 CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE**

The definition of culture has been changing over time and remains an unresolved debate. Over 100 definitions of culture have been proposed (Baldwin & Lindsley, 1994) and one single definition may be too restrictive. Culture is a term that carries different meanings to different people. Starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a relativistic sense of culture was developed in which culture was seen as a set of desired qualities and the world could be divided into any number of cultures, each with intrinsic value (Williams, 1958). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, anthropologists and sociologists argued strongly that one's social and cultural environment, rather than racial differences, was the dominant force in shaping one's behavior, and that different cultures held self-contained and

alternative valid worldviews (Levi-Strauss, 1958; Mead, 1961; Weber, 1968). However, their views on the precise definition of culture were contrasting.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social scientists challenged aspects of the definition that culture was simply shared knowledge, values and products of a group of people. Some attacked the views based on ‘genetic determinism’ and defined culture as behavior that is not given at birth, but must be learned from adults throughout the generations (Benedict, 1943). Some viewed the study of cultural systems as a method to gain insights into the ways in which our own socialization limits our self-understanding (Boas, 1928; Mead, 1995). The development in psychology of the concept of ‘unconsciousness’ also influenced the understanding of culture. Freud (Brill, 1995); Jung (Jaffe, 1979)) shared the insight that experience shaped behavior in unseen ways.

Culture is a multi-dimensional concept, and there are many sources of cultural confusion, conflicts, ignorance, fear, anxiety, differences, misunderstandings, exclusion and frustration. For example, Tylor (1887) defined culture as: “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1887: 1). Linton (1940: 288) defined culture as “the sum total of the knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society”.

Given this wide embrace of the term, it is not surprising that sources of, or opportunities for, problems of cross-cultural adjustment arise. Indeed, the constituent elements of culture, being so many, give many opportunities for cross-cultural difficulties to arise, for example in the following spheres:

1. Tools, weapons, fire, agriculture, animal domestication, writing, music, games, clothing, religion, political systems, food, science, sports, and social organizations.
2. All aspects of human activity, from the fine arts to popular entertainment, from everyday behavior to the development of sophisticated technology. It contains the plans, rules, techniques, design, and policies for living.
3. Values, beliefs, and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation through symbolic learning and language.

4. The accumulation of knowledge that is shared by a society.
5. Shared meanings that are beyond the mind of any individual
6. Fundamental principles in guiding behaviors
7. Child-rearing practices
8. Family and extended family

Culture is the expression of groups of people, not one person. It links and unifies individuals, linking people to their group identity and creating unity. It comprises, transmits and reinforces the basic ideas, values and ideals of the group.

However, with the wide spread of globalization and multiculturalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, traditional characterizations of culture have been challenged as the combined population of most countries has become so fluid. There has been vigorous debate about the nature of cultural identity, emphasizing the complexity of how issues such as gender, politics and media interact within the context of globalization to produce highly fragmented patterns of self-identification (Friedman, 1994; McGuigan, 1999; Sherbert *et al.*, 2006). Some argued that the traditional boundaries of cultural identity have become so fragmented in modern societies that the concept of culture and cultural identity should be called into question (Hall & Du Gay, 1996) and that, rather, a narrow focus on particular situations should be adopted, rather than talking about culture in the sense of predicting behavior and making generalizations (Agar, 2002).

Although globalization has facilitated the ease and frequency of global communication which leads to a possible cultural convergence in a globalized world, globalization and communication technology have also revolutionized the breath and depth of cross-cultural relationships that result in increasing interconnected and diverse cultural communities. Hence culture does not control behavior, but is a network of products, meanings and expectations that communities share (Shaules, 2007). Understanding the concept of culture has correspondingly grown more difficult.

Cultural studies are often interested in the elements that contribute to one's sense of social identity such as race, gender, and ethnicity. But social identity is not necessarily the basis for understanding the frameworks of meanings of another community. One should be cautious not to overestimate the cultural similarity by confusing the usages of the term culture (Shaules, 2007). Perhaps the definition of Bennett is helpful:

National groups such as Japanese, Mexican, and US American and pan-national ethnic groups such as Arab and Zulu are cultures at a high level of abstraction – the qualities that adhere to most members of the culture are very general, and the group includes lots of diversity. At this level of abstraction we can only point to general differences in patterns of thinking and behaving between cultures.

(Bennett, 1993: 67)

The insight of Bennett highlights that broad cultural labels are still meaningful if they only imply the sharing of particular cultural frameworks instead of implying that any individual will necessarily identify themselves in a particular way. Hall (1959; 1976; 1984) also made an important contribution to the conceptualization of culture in arguing that when interacting with people from other cultural communities, we are actually interacting with other worldviews and that surface behavior is tied to deep and hidden networks of meaning, values and expectations that our hosts share with each other which we do not fully understand. Bennett's (1993) phenomenological view of intercultural sensitivity and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) view of the hidden assumptions that underline cultural value dilemmas share with Hall's point that culture acts as a perceptual framework used to make sense of the world and, in turn, informs choices about particular behavior. This view of culture seems to fit well with the experiences reported by those who face intercultural learning challenges as many sojourners in this research talked of their experiences in terms of cultural difference or 'patterns of difference' as observed by Shaules and Hall.

Hofstede (1980) treated culture as implicit, unconscious and subjective with a core that is distinctive and discrete for each nation. He believed that culture determines behaviour, and was 'territorially unique' in that it distinguishes one nation from another. He argued that culture is common to all individuals within the nation and that there are sub-cultural differences and heterogeneity rather than major cultural differences within a nation. However, he was criticized for having a thin and limited notion of culture, for overlooking variations in cultures within nations, and there were also several major problems with his methodology (for example: the sample for his 1980 book *Culture's Consequences* was IBM employees in 66 countries; not all the questionnaires were returned - out of the 117,000 questionnaires administered, the

average number per country was either small or extremely small (e.g. in 15 countries there were fewer than 200 questionnaires, and the population was not so homogeneous to ensure that such small samples would be representative); and most of the respondents to the questionnaires were sales and marketing employees. His claim that national culture is situationally non-specific and uniform was unfounded and not proven as he had generalized unfairly from specific situations instead of examining other situations. Nevertheless, his work had a profound effect in sensitizing people to major fields of cross-cultural difference, including:

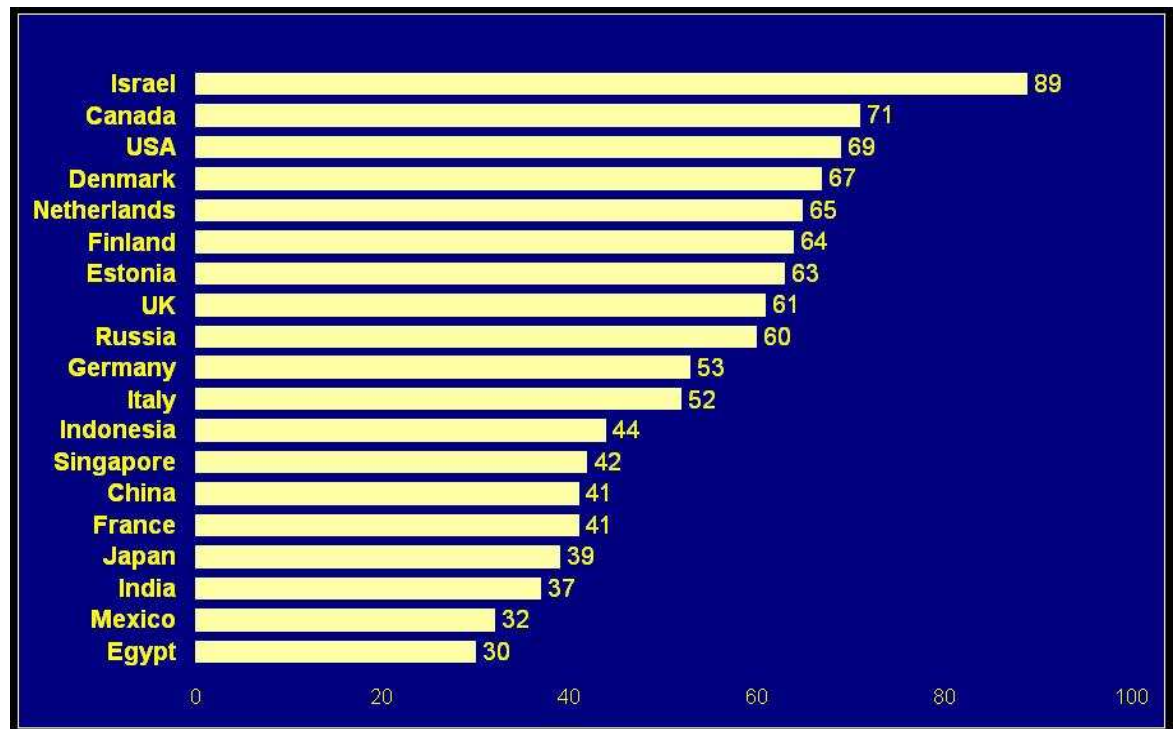
- Individualistic and collectivistic cultures;
- Difference of power distance: the degree of social inequality considered normal by people; the distance between individuals at different levels of a hierarchy – from equal (small power distance) to extremely unequal (large power distance), with power distance being very great in some cultures (strict hierarchies) and smaller in others (more open and democratic cultures);
- Uncertainty avoidance (some cultures prefer risk avoidance and the security/certainty of structures and set procedures, whilst other cultures encourage risk taking and less certainty);
- Masculinity (with an emphasis on success, assertiveness, toughness, money, status, competition) and femininity (with an emphasis on personal relationships, care for others, quality of life, service).

In a Chinese culture Bond (1991) added another cultural dimension of Chinese values: attitudes towards time (long-term to short-term orientation); persistence; ordering by status; protection of 'face' and the avoidance of bringing shame; respect for tradition; and the giving of gifts and favors. Cultures also differ in respect of the emphasis placed on cultural context. High-context cultures emphasize: establishing social trust first; valuing personal relations and goodwill; agreement by general trust; and negotiations being slow and ritualistic. These are exemplified in Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese cultures (Eastern cultures). By contrast, low-context cultures emphasize: getting down to business first; valuing expertise and performance; agreement by specific, legalistic contract; negotiations to be as efficient as possible. These are exemplified in German, Swiss, North American and Scandinavian cultures (Western cultures). Given these differences the opportunities for difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment are many, as westerners coming into a Hong Kong (largely

Chinese) context may find different values, norms, behaviours and definitions of what constituted accepted, everyday practice and behaviour.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) add to the conceptualization of cultures and countries that they differ in the degrees to which they emphasize individual freedom (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Countries' emphases on individual freedom



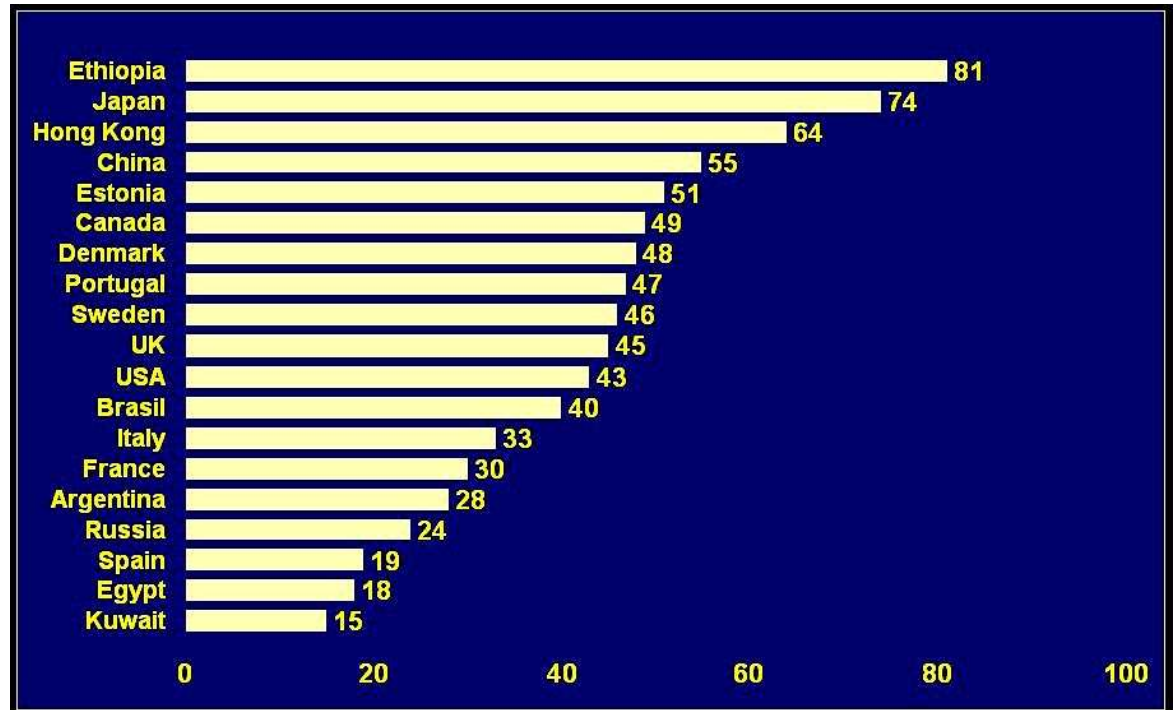
Source: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998)

They also indicate that cultures and countries differ in the amount to which they express emotions overtly (Figure 2.3).

It can be seen that the potential for difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment may be immense here, as English speaking countries differ greatly from countries in which English is not the first language, and that, perhaps crudely put, there are significant differences between East and West here. Hence a westerner coming to an oriental culture may experience very significant differences in terms of what is considered acceptable and not acceptable, usual and unusual. Even though it may be debatable whether it is possible to classify countries according to the dimensions indicated by Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), nevertheless it may be

useful to use these as orienting concepts that may indicate cross-cultural differences, whether these are country-wide phenomena or not. At issue here is the matter that cross-cultural adjustment needs to take account of very different sets of values and definitions of what is and is not accepted and acceptable behaviour.

Figure 2.3: Countries' overt expressions of emotions



Source: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998)

## 2.3 UNDERSTANDING TYPES OF MIGRANTS AND DIMENSIONS OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACT

The section will indicate the multi-dimensionality of the concepts of culture and cross-culture, and will identify several of these dimensions that will feature in the empirical research. It will argue that cross-cultural adjustment, because of this multi-dimensionality, is not easy to address, resolve and implement. For example, it will argue that there are different processes, theories, time dimensions to adjustment, levels of adjustment, interactions between culture and personality, personal responses to cross-cultural differences and varying levels of cultural stress tolerance by migrants.

Contact between people of diverse cultures has been a topic of interest for decades. With the globalization of business, industry, education, entertainment and leisure

pursuits (Erez and Earley, 1983), the nature, process and outcome of cross-cultural contacts have become much more complex.

According to Martin and Nakayama (2007), migrants can be divided into two main types: individual and group. Migration may be short term or long term, voluntary or involuntary. Hence, four main types of migrant groups can be identified: two groups of voluntary migrants including sojourners and immigrants; sojourners are those who opt to travel to a new cultural environment for a limited period of time on specific purposes such as students or missionaries; immigrants are who opt to leave their home countries to settle in another country for various personal reasons such as family reunion or career development. The two types of migrants who move involuntarily include short-term and long-term refugees. Refugees are usually displaced to another country for short or long durations beyond their own control due to natural or man-made casualties at home such as famine or wars.

Many variables related to the personal psychology of individuals in cultural contact can be identified: on whose territory the interactions take place, the time-span, its purpose; the type of involvement; the frequency of contact; the degree of intimacy; relative status and power, and the distinguishing characteristics of the participants (Bochner, 1982). Bochner's analysis suggests that within-society cross-cultural interactions and between-society sojourner contacts differ in several important aspects. Permanent members of multicultural societies or those intending to become permanent (e.g. immigrants) meet on territories that are joint. Their commitment is likely to be higher because it is long term, and there will be frequent contacts with dissimilar persons, including host members and other migrant groups. However, whether these relations attain intimacy will depend on a range of other variables, such as the relative status and size of the participating groups.

In the present context the subjects of interest are the Native-speaking English Teachers (NETs) who have 'come later' in contrast to the established 'owners' of the territory. The interactions occur on a foreign ground instead of a joint territory. The chances for interactions with locals are high for the NETs because most of their colleagues and students are ethnic Chinese. However, since they will at some stage return to their countries of origin, their commitment to the host country is expected to be low. There are some indications supporting this claim as it was consistently reported in the



newspapers (Forestier, 2005c) that about a substantial number of the NETs set to quit after their teaching contracts finished. However, there are also NETs who stay in Hong Kong for extensive periods of time ever since they joined the scheme in 1998. Acceptance of a foreign assignment seems to indicate a willingness to adjust to the international environment. Research finds that only those who show high levels of enthusiasm and involvement are likely to be committed to achieving a real understanding and acceptance of the conditions in the host country (Osland, 1995).

There is a rich and increasing body of literature on research in refugees and business expatriates. Immigrants and student sojourners may be among the best-researched groups of cross-cultural travelers (Bochner, 2002). However, research on voluntary expatriate professionals such as the subject of this research in alien cultures is comparatively scarce. The NETs, voluntary cross-cultural travelers, are on the increase globally, particularly in Asia where the demand for such professionals is high. They differ from business expatriates as they are not sent out by corporations and hence do not have the backup of parent companies in their assignments. Yet due to their professions, NETs have an impact on the people and the society they interact with, notably the youngsters and the educational system of the host countries they serve. To fill this area further, this research attempts to investigate the cross-cultural experiences and responses of this group of voluntary cross-cultural professionals, and to contribute to a better understanding and enhancement of the implementation of the NET scheme in Hong Kong.

### **2.3.1 Cross-cultural adjustment theories**

Cross cultural adjustment has been studied within the domains of various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Terms that have been used interchangeably include expatriate assimilation (Hannigan, 1990), acculturation (Triandis *et al.*, 1986), adaptation (e.g. Nash, 1991; Triandis, 1980), expatriate success (Thomas, 1999), and effectiveness (Taft, 1977; Wilson & Dalton, 1998). Most researchers tend to use these terms interchangeably (Black, 1988).

Moreover, some studies identified various facets of adjustment: work, general and interaction (Torbiorn, 1982; Black, 1988; Black & Stephen, 1989, Gregersen & Black, 1990; Black & Gregersen, 1991). *Work adjustment* refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort regarding the job tasks of the foreign assignment. *General*

*adjustment* refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort regarding non-work factors, such as food, clothing, and living conditions associated with the foreign national culture. *Interaction adjustment* is the expatriate's psychological comfort in interacting with host country nationals. There are also other dimensions identified such as psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, work adjustment (Aycan, 1997).

The most prominent cross cultural adjustment theories are process theories, personality based theories, stress-coping theories and interactive theories (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985).

### **2.3.2 Process theories**

In process theories, the characterizations of adaptation stages have been described in “curves” that depicts the patterns of adaptive change over time. One prominent theory was proposed by Oberg (1960) who argued that there are four main stages involved:

- the honeymoon stage;
- the hostility stage (frustration, anxiety, and hostility toward the host country);
- beginning adaptation;
- and thorough adjustment (in which the foreigner now has sets of behaviors for home and host environments and knows how to use each appropriately).

Arnold (1967) proposed a four-stage model of cultural adaptation and described a “U” shaped curve in which one's level of satisfaction and adjustment begins high, drops sharply, begins to rise, and reaches a level equal to the arrival level. There were findings that supported the “U-curve” hypothesis in which sojourners' psychological change was predicted. An initial period of elation will be followed by a dip in the level of adaptation and then a gradual recovery (Deutsch & Won, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955). This popularized U-curve pattern of cultural adaptation was later extended to a “W-curve” (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1966; Trifonovitch, 1977) to include the sojourner's adjustment upon returning home from his overseas assignment stage.

The U-curve proposition has been popular as it is intuitively appealing and offers a convenient and common sense explanation for understanding cross-cultural adjustment (Bochner, 1994). However, there have been criticisms that the U-curve or W-curve patterns of adaptive change may not be applicable to all strangers' personal experience

and that support for the U-curve hypothesis is inconclusive and over generalized (Church, 1982). Other studies could not find evidence to support the view that individuals necessarily experienced elation and optimism in the beginning of their intercultural experiences (Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Ward *et al.*, 1999). In some studies that support the hypothesis, it was indicated that there could be marked differences in the time parameters of the curve, hence raising questions regarding the preciseness of the U-curve in predicting specific incidents of cross-cultural sojourns (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). There were also criticisms that there was a lack of a theoretical explanation for *why* individuals experience the adjustment stages and *how* individuals move through the stages (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Another major criticism is that the U-curve proposition has been primarily evaluated by cross-sectional research, whereas, given that the proposed cross-cultural changes of sojourners would take place over time, a longitudinal approach would be more suitable (Klineberg and Hull, 1979). Ward and her associates (1993, 1998) differentiated between psychological and socio-cultural adjustment and conducted two longitudinal studies with international students. They found that the two forms of adjustment follow different tracks, which undermines the utility of the U-curve hypothesis. Empirical support for the theory is weak (Church, 1982).

Some researchers, viewing cross-cultural experiences as progressing in stages, tended to view these experiences as a learning experience for intercultural sojourners despite the anxiety or pain to be experienced during the adaptation process (Kao, 1975; Heath, 1977; Adler, 1987; Wrightsman, 1994). Kim (1988, 2001) developed a theory of stress-adaptation growth dynamic to illustrate the process of intercultural transformation. She agreed that the challenges of handling daily activities would be most severe during the initial phases, as shown in the cultural shock studies. She further argued (1988, 2001) that experiences of stress prompted adaptation because when the environment continued to threaten internal conditions, individuals would feel it necessary to meet the challenge by adding to the existing system of ideas and reconfiguring it into a new set of coping abilities and these adaptive responses would lead to subtle internal growth as individuals work out new ways of handling problems. The interdependence of stress, adaptation, and the internal transformation that followed as the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic is illustrated in Figure 2.4 below.

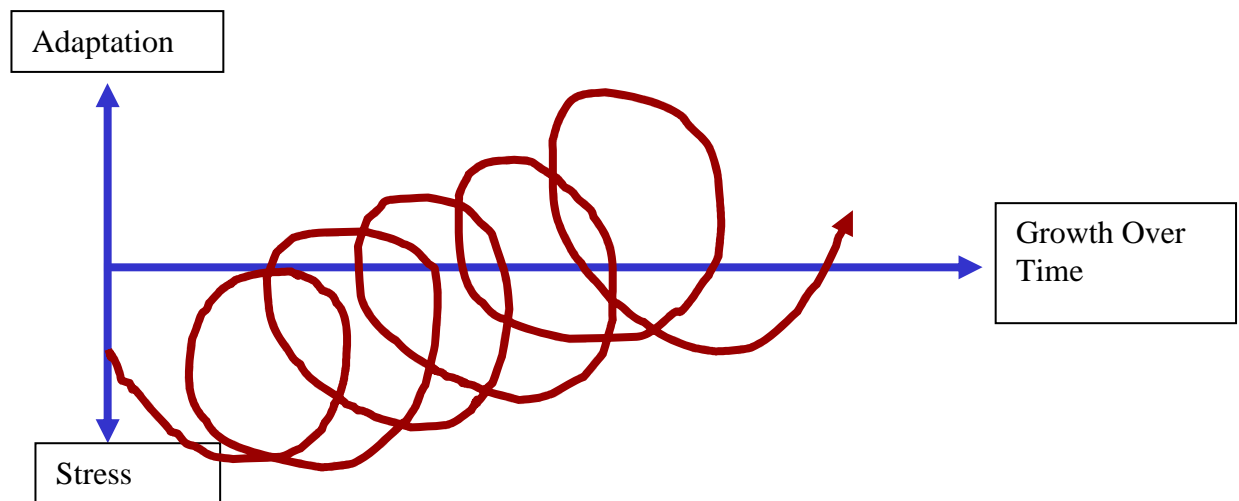


Figure 2.4: Stress-adaptation-growth dynamic

*Source:* Kim (2001)

Empirical validation of this development has been offered in Kim's (1976, 1977) study of Korean immigrants that suggested a pattern of perceptual development in strangers over time towards greater clarity, depth, scope, balance, and integration. However, few systematic studies have directly examined the phenomenon of the process of intercultural identity development described above despite some indirect support for the phenomenon of the process of intercultural transformation as reported by Eaton and Lasry (1978). There were also no details on the subtle and intricate psychological dynamic of stress, adaptation, and growth as well as the gradual and unquantifiable identity transformation depicted above.

Bennett also (1993) presented a six-stage model that described intercultural sensitivity in which individuals might move from ethnocentrism stages: denial, defense, minimization, to ethnorelativism stages of acceptance, adaptation and integration. Ethnocentric stages and their sub-stages involve preservation of the centrality of one's own worldview. In these stages, difference is perceived to be threatening: actions taken aim at tackling the threat. The major impediment to movement beyond ethnocentrism is that individuals believe that it is not important to get beyond being oneself in the new environment. Ethnorelativism is based on the assumption that cultures can be understood only in relation to each other or in their own terms. Ethnorelativism also requires that specific behaviors can be understood only within a cultural context: there are no right or wrong or goodness quotients that can be logically applied to cultural

behavior. Likewise, cultural difference is neither good nor bad; it is merely different. The ethnorelative stages and their sub-stages are characterized by difference as non-threatening.

In this research, it is found that, for NETs, one of the commonest problems they encountered in Hong Kong was multi-level marginalization, i.e. the EDB did not give adequate preparation, NETs were put out in remote schools, and when they got into the schools the resident staff marginalized them. They were treated as outsiders rather than as partners, i.e. the host culture (Hong Kong, community, schools, departments) seemed reluctant to change itself and expected the NETs to be the only parties to change.

Although studies have been undertaken to demonstrate the validity of Bennett's model (Bennett, 1993; see also Paige, 1983; Hammer *et al.*, 2003), critiques found that, while the general approach of the model seemed intuitively obvious, the particular stages and sequencing of learning described were less obvious (Shaules, 2007). Different studies testing the validity of the categories in his model suggested that the factors were not highly stable (Paige, 1983; Hammer *et al.*, 2003;). Sometimes only five instead of six categories were identified and the ability of his model to describe intercultural learning in a fixed series of six distinct stages was questioned. Moreover, there was also a challenge that Bennett's model might lack validity across cultures, given his US background (Hammer *et al.*, 2003). It was also cautioned that Bennett's categories tended to over-generalize the concept of intercultural sensitivity while individual sojourners have differing and contradictory reactions to their experiences that suggested a mixed instead of a single discrete stage of intercultural development (Shaules, 2007).

Having said that, Bennett's categories still provide helpful insights to describe the overall stage, not a particular reaction, of the cross-cultural sojourners. Researchers did agree with his fundamental assumption that an increased ability to construe cultural difference lies at the core of the intercultural learning process and that sojourners might not be aware of their own level of intercultural sensitivity; moreover their intercultural learning could be a process that took place independently of sojourners' opinions of their own intercultural learning (Sparrow, 2006; Shaules, 2007).

In summary, the basic notion of the process models is the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills, no matter whether the patterns of change are U-curve, linear or other curve patterns (Lysgaard, 1955; Adler, 1975). Researchers acknowledged variations in cross-cultural adaptation, but argued about the precise pattern of change and the mechanism of the change (Ward *et al.*, 1998). It is also difficult to identify the different stages, explain the variations, or measure the durations. However, the difficulties of conducting longitudinal research constrain process studies (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985).

Process theories argue for the importance of paying attention to the processes involved in, and stages of, cross-cultural adjustment. Such adjustment does not simply occur overnight, and different factors occur at different stages of adjustment. Hence it is important, in the empirical research, to track the nature, stages and processes of cross-cultural adjustment that were experienced by the sojourners, not least so that recommendations can be made for facilitating and supporting the process of cross-cultural adjustments in the NETs, and the empirical research addresses this.

### **2.3.3 Personality-based theories**

Cross-cultural adjustment, its nature, stresses and significance, may be due, in part, to factors of a sojourner's personality. Different sojourners adjust differently, and at different rates, to a host culture, and this is, in part, a function of their personality characteristics. Sojourners with particular personality types or profiles may be able to adjust more easily than sojourners with other personality types, and, indeed personality itself may differ according to the cultures in which one is brought up and, by contrast in the host culture in which the sojourner is working. Put briefly, personality differences and dissonances between those in the sojourner/the sojourner's home country and the host culture may influence the ease with which the sojourner makes cross-cultural adjustments.

In the literature, there is an overwhelming emphasis on the expatriate's individual characteristics. The basic assumption is that identifying the attitudes, traits, and skills that predict overseas success would improve selection procedures and training practices (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Personality-based determinants related to a person's sociability and openness have received the most attention in relation to adjustment (e.g., Stenning, 1979; Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black,

1990; Caligiuri, 2000). In addition, the Five Factor Model (i.e. Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) of Personality (the 'Big Five') has also been used to organize the potential predictors of expatriate job success (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997). The 'Big Five' personality elements have been found to be present in some countries (e.g. western countries), and, whilst their presence has also been found in non-western cultures and countries, the profiles of these elements, their importance, and the presence of other personality factors, have been found in non-western cultures, i.e. personality-typing and typologies may differ between cultures and this may be a contributing factor to cross-cultural adjustment or dissonance.

For example, whilst the Big Five are found in western cultures, research found that the Big 5 factors also appear in different cultures: Japan, the Philippines, Germany. Other research found that the Big 5 factors were common in America, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Italy, Finland, Poland, China and Hong Kong. However, even if they are found in different cultures, it is difficult to verify whether they are as important in different cultures. The five-factor model has been criticized for being too western; research in China and the Philippines found four of the Big Five, including neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, but it did not find openness to experience; and additional factors in the Chinese personality have been found that were not present in the western factors (Bond, 1991; Goldberg, 1992; Yik and Bond, 1993; Cheung *et al.*, 1996; McCrae and Costa, 1996; Cheung *et al.*, 2001; Liu *et al.*, 2007).

Systematic research has shown that the personality of Chinese consists of seven factors (Wang *et al.*, 2005; Cui & Wang, 2003), which is different from the five factors of the Western personality structure. Eastern cultures are found to be more collectivist and less individualist than western cultures, e.g. Hofstede, 1980). Research found that Chinese were less positive of themselves than Americans and that Chinese placed more emphasis on politeness than Americans; Liu *et al.*, 2007) in Chinese societies face management is very important (face saving, face giving, face gaining, face keeping) (e.g. Bond, 1991).

Lam and Graham (2007) found that American and Chinese were different in many significant aspects as indicated below (Table 2.1). The Hong Kong business culture is characterized by its efficiency and speed.

Table 2.1: Differences in American and Chinese cultural values and ways of thinking

Summary of Differences in American and Chinese Basic Cultural Values and Ways of Thinking

<u>American</u>	<u>Chinese</u>
Individualism	Collectivism
Egalitarianism	Hierarchy
Information-oriented	Relationship-oriented
Focus, foreground, object	Big picture, background, environment
Reductionism	Holism
Content	Context
The truth	The way, compromise

*Source:* Lam and Graham (2007) *China Now*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

However, relatively few studies have empirically recorded the influence of personality traits on the psychological well-being of cross-cultural travelers (Bochner, 2002). Evidence for personality-based models tends to be anecdotal (Bochner, 2002). Moreover, studies on some traits, such as extraversion, often produced inconsistent results (Armes and Ward, 1989; Van den Broucke *et al.*, 1989) while some research failed to find evidence of some predictors such as locus of control (Dyal, 1984; Partridge, 1987). Despite the inconsistency of research results on personality traits as predictors of cross-cultural success, the findings attract the attention of researchers, as they may highlight the importance of the interaction of situation and personal characteristics and the notion of cultural fit (Church, 1982; Furham and Bocher, 1986).

The significance of personality studies in the context of this thesis is to suggest that the constituent elements, their balance and what are valued, may vary from culture to culture. Hence, adjusting to a different culture may require sojourners to be prepared for different kinds of personality, different elements of personality being valued or not valued, and for people's personalities to manifest themselves in the host culture differently from in the sojourner's home country. Hence there is a possibility of difference, dissonance, frustration and stress stemming from the clash of different personalities, located within different cultural roots.



### **2.3.4 Stress-coping theories and interactive theories of cultural-adjustment**

The other two types of theories of cross-cultural adjustment are stress-coping and interactive theories. The underlying concerns of psychological stress coping are very practical. Living and working in a foreign culture can cause massive stress. Culture shock, defined as feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and irritability, is a typical adjustment reaction syndrome (Adler, 1975; Befus, 1988). As reviewed by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985), scholars have applied psychological stress-coping models to explain acculturation strategies (e.g., Barna, 1983; Weissman & Furnham, 1987; Befus, 1988). Research has focused on Critical Life Events that examine the influence of life changes, personality, individuals' cognitive appraisal of the change and social support on sojourner adjustment (Berry *et al.*, 1987; Coyle, 1988; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). These were generalized as non-work stressors.

The relationship between work-related stress and work adjustment has been consistently observed in a number of studies (e.g., Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Shaffer *et al.*, 1998). Research has identified stressors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and role novelty to be negatively related to work adjustment in an international transfer, but these are not expected to influence interaction and general adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Role discretion allows individuals to adapt their work role and setting to themselves rather than adapt themselves to the situation (Black and Gregersen, 1991). Stress theories have also been used to explain the importance of spouses and families in the adjustment process (e.g. Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999) (and indeed the Hong Kong Legislative Council (2005b) commented on the importance of taking account of spouses in the NET scheme).

To date, few authors have studied adjustment from an interactive perspective, i.e. that perspective that states that cultural adjustment takes place in, and through, cultural interaction. The Leader-member Exchange (LMX) model proposed by Graen & Cashman (1975) and Graen & Scandura (1987) explains the relationship between supervisors and subordinates that develops as a result of their work place interaction. The model illustrates that, because of time pressure, the leader can develop close relationships with only a few key subordinates. Kraimer *et al.* (2001) first proposed LMX as a positive input to expatriate's work adjustment. Varma and Stroh (2001) suggested that high quality LMX relationships tend to be stable over time and may

result in higher levels of support and guidance from supervisors, higher levels of subordinate satisfaction and performance, lower levels of subordinate turnover and, most importantly, better quality of assignment performance.

It can be seen that there is a range of psychological theories of cross-cultural adjustment; these complement each other. Hence it will be important to include all of these areas in the empirical investigation in order to do justice to the multi-dimensionality of psychological theories. It is also important to note that these theories place significance on the participants' "definitions of the situations" and act on the basis of those definitions, i.e. "if men [*sic.*] define their situations as real, then they are real in the consequences" (Thomas, 1928: 571). The implication of this is that careful preparation and induction of NETs are required in order to ensure that their perceptions are accurate, i.e. it will be important to find out the induction they experienced from EDB, and this will feature in the empirical investigation. It is also to suggest that *emic* rather than *etic* analysis is important for studying cross-cultural adjustment, and the empirical research addresses this.

## **2.4 OUTCOMES OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACT**

### **2.4.1 Learning cultural differences (or similarities)**

The first thing expatriates may normally experience after arriving in a culturally different environment may be that they find themselves awkwardly standing out, in some way, from the majority culture in the new environment as they look, sound, and act differently from those native to the new environment. Paige (1983) stated that being physically different from members of the host culture will make one feel highly visible and hence intensify psychological stress.

Another major difference expatriates may find lies in the domain of general behavior expectations, the unwritten rules of how to act so as not to appear different. Weaver (1993) stated that the most common symptom of culture shock is a lack of control or sense of helplessness due to sojourners' lack of knowledge of how to act or behave in the new environment; unconscious reactions to the situation control sojourners unless they understand what is happening to them psychologically.

Moreover, expatriates will also find differences between their physical and living spaces in their home environment and those in the new environment. Weaver (1993)

viewed that changing physical environments caused stress. Barna's research (1983) on stress suggested that change of physical environments, in and of itself, produces much of the stress that may be attributed to culture shock.

As Bennett (1993) described, the phenomenology of difference is the key to understanding intercultural sensitivity. Individuals in similar circumstances behave differently, depending upon their individual construing of events. They might move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. The ethnorelative stages and their sub-stages are characterized by difference as non-threatening. Cultural differences are enjoyable and sought after; there is respect for behavioral and value differences, empathy, pluralism, and contextual evaluation of difference.

Bennett's model is developmental, cognitive and phenomenological. It saw dealing with cultural differences as the primary challenge of intercultural competence, but did not focus on behavior or how people feel about a particular culture. It is possible that, to someone who could not construe cultural differences, other cultural worldviews would be nonexistent or denigrated (Shaules, 2007). McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) stated that ethical choices must be made for intercultural sensitivity to develop, with the awareness that these choices are based on the knowledge that different viable actions are possible.

As before, the preceding discussion underlines the significance of the NETs having accurate perceptions of the situations so that their cross-cultural adjustment is informed and sensitive, and so that they are aware of how to increase empathic behaviour in the new situation. They must be prepared to be regarded as different, as, indeed they are. However, the notion of difference extends in two directions: the host culture regards the sojourner as different and the sojourner regards the host culture as different, and this may lead to difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment, for example what is accepted and acceptable practice in one culture may be unaccepted and unacceptable practice in another, just as expectations of oneself and others may vary from culture to culture. Difference, and handling difference, may cause stress in cross-cultural adjustment, for both the sojourner and the host country and institution.

### **2.4.2 Culture shock**

When we are confronted with cultural differences, we tend to view people from other cultures as strangers (Shack, 1979). When strangers enter into a new environment, stress occurs for them. Strangers do not understand the social world inhabited by members of the group they came into contact and hence may have many problems and even experience crises unfathomable to the host nationals (Schuetz, 1944; Herman and Schield, 1960; Parrillo, 1980). Researchers therefore highlighted the point that cross-cultural contact is a difficult and stressful life experience (e.g. Ward, 1996; Bochner, 2002).

The concept of culture shock was initially described as an ‘occupational disease’ of those going abroad who suffered the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols in the social environment (Oberg, 1960). Weaver (1993) took an overview of the relevant research of culture shock and summarized three elements to this process: loss of familiar cues, the breakdown of interpersonal communication and identity crisis. Individuals differed greatly in the degree in which culture shock affects them and some individuals could not live in foreign countries (Oberg, 1960; Taft, 1977).

Moreover, it should also be noted that nowadays globalization is revolutionizing intercultural relationships, communication technology is changing the cross-cultural experiences of people (McLuhan and Fiore, 1968) and the world has become a new “transcultural community” (Agar, 2002). Will it be possible that the extent or impact of culture shock will be reduced and that it may be less traumatic to live in a new environment? Globalization makes intercultural contact more common but also more complex, the number of people facing the challenge also increases tremendously and their reactions may also vary more widely than before, and it can be possible that the change in our global environment is so fast that our understanding of resulting personal challenges lacks seriously behind (Shaules, 2007). Deep cultural differences still pose a challenge to most cross-cultural sojourners and culture shock may perhaps remain an issue with more subtle or hidden influence. While culture shock is spoken of as having symptoms, as if it were a diagnosable condition (Oberg, 1960), prediction of culture shock generally has always been elusive despite a variety of symptoms have been observed. However, research on culture shock helps understand the stages and

progression of an intercultural experience and how individuals do react to intercultural environments (Bennett, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward *et al.*, 1998; 2001).

It is important to recognize that culture shock may exert a significant impact on both sojourners and the host country or institution. Coming to terms with bearers of new and different cultures may be a protracted affair, i.e. it is a process, not just a single event, and this may be stressful. What constitutes cultural shock will vary from person to person, and hence it is important to explore this in the terms of the persons involved, in the case of the empirical study here, the NETS themselves.

### **2.4.3 Attitudes and relationships**

When individuals or groups from different cultures interact with each other, each other's life will be affected in various aspects depending on many factors such as the conditions under which the interaction takes place, the status and power of the people concerned (Stonequist, 1937; Bochner, 1982). Hence, the outcomes may take many different forms. Bochner (1982) developed a set of principles attempting to classify all of the empirically observed outcomes of cultural contact within a single overall framework. Four types of most possible response styles were identified: passing, chauvinist, marginal, and mediating.

Individuals caught up in contact situations in which the second culture has a higher status may usually reject the original culture to adopt the new culture; this effect is referred to as 'passing' (Stonequist, 1937). However, sometimes individuals may choose to reject those influences and try to hold on to his culture of origin, they may become "militant nationalists and chauvinists" (Tajfel and Dawson, 1965). Sometimes individuals may vacillate between the two cultures due to many reasons, a state that was described as the 'marginal syndrome' (Park, 1928). Lastly, some people were able to synthesize their various cultural identities, and acquire genuine bicultural or multicultural personalities. Such individuals were relatively rare, and Bochner (1982) referred to them as 'mediating persons'.

Berry *et al.*, (1987) also developed a framework and classified the responses into four categories similar to Bochner's model: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. His framework depicts the relationship between the migrants and the hosts, their attitudes towards each other's countries, and four possible relationships

resulting from cross cultural interaction: assimilation, separation, integration, marginalization. Assimilation is a type of cultural adaptation in which individuals feel they have a choice to give up their own cultural heritage and adopt the mainstream cultural identity. However, in many cases, immigrants feel that they are forced to assimilate the dominant culture due to ethnic or racial discrimination either on the job or in public settings.

Separation refers to the situation in which an individual retains his or her original culture while interacting minimally with other groups, either voluntarily or involuntarily which results in segregation. Integration refers to individuals maintaining both their original culture and daily interactions with their groups. Marginalization occurs when an individual expresses little interest in maintaining cultural ties with either the dominant culture or the migrant culture or when individuals who are not able to participate fully in the life in a new country (e.g. largely due to cultural differences) deliberately live on the margin of a culture, i.e. marginalization might be a positive as well as a negative feature.

These frameworks captured most of the possibilities occurring in cross-cultural contact. However, the actual interactions are so complicated that, in some cases, migrants may relate to the host country in different modes at different times, adopting a mode of cultural 'hybridity' (Berry, 1987). They may assimilate on one occasion, but attempt to separate on other occasion, they may integrate at times, and marginalize at other times. An example is of a migrant who may want economic assimilation through his employment, linguistic integration through bilingualism, but social separation by marrying someone from his own cultural group and socializing with members of his own cultural group (Berry, 1987). Nowadays, many people consider themselves the product of many cultures and hence it would not be easy to classify them into any of the categories. These are cultural hybrids.

Attitudes and relationships figure large in considerations of cross-cultural adjustment and problems of cross-cultural adjustment, and these are explored in the empirical research. Factored into these are issues of the experiences of status and power/powerlessness, marginalization and inclusion, and these, too, are explored in the empirical study.

#### **2.4.4 Intercultural competence**

Culture is a complex concept, difficult to define and shifting with time. Is it possible to define and measure cross-cultural success? Spitzberg (2000) gave a general definition suggesting that intercultural communicative competence is behavior appropriate and effective in a given context. Kim (2001) gives a more specific definition that intercultural communication competence is the overall internal capability of an individual to handle key challenging aspects of intercultural communication such as cultural differences, unfamiliarity, inter-group posture, and the accompanying experience of stress. A competent communicator can analyze the situation and select an appropriate mode of action.

Byram (1997) has given a detailed definition of intercultural competence. The components include knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds for belonging to a given social group. (Byram, 2003). Intercultural knowledge (*savoir*) is the understanding of the practices and products of social groups and general processes of their societal and individual interaction instead of being merely about a specific culture. The skills of comparison, interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) imply that one could interpret an information or event from the perspective of another culture and explain and relate it to one's own. Attitude (*savoir être*) refers to a willingness to "relativise" one's own values, beliefs and behaviors instead of assuming that theirs are the absolutely correct ones (Byram, 2003). This is similar to the ethnorelativistic stage in Bennett's model. Finally, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) demonstrates an ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria the practices, products or perspectives of one's own or other cultures (Byram, 1997)

Byram's ideas are important. Firstly, he breaks down intercultural competencies into detailed elements in order to enable an easier understanding of the complex phenomenon of cultural learning. Instead of giving a broad idealization, he highlights the contextual nature of intercultural interaction. He lists clearly the sub-competencies under each cultural competence. The learning goals he provides are also much more concrete. The level is finely defined and a list of sub-competencies has been produced. For example, his five *savoirs* are broken down into nearly 30 sub-competencies. His definitions of some learning goals such as 'cultural awareness' and related processes such as how individual learners reached deeper levels of intercultural

learning would have benefited from further expansion. He had not dealt with the possible negative outcomes of intercultural contact such as prejudice (Shaules, 2007).

It is not easy to measure 'intercultural competence'. Bennett (1993) indicated that the highest stage of intercultural sensitivity is a person described by Adler (1987) as a 'multicultural man' without having a primary affiliation with a single culture. Bennett (1993) referred this as constructive marginality in which the persons are beyond all cultural frames of reference and can consciously raise assumptions to 'a meta-level'. Used as a measure of intercultural competence, the desired outcomes of Bennett's model have received numerous criticisms. Instead of supporting the view that integrated marginality was the final stage of intercultural sensitivity, empirical studies (Sparrow, 2006, Shaules, 2007) argued that one's own cultural rootedness is often still pre-eminent, even though one may be able to work in several cultures. Researchers (Sparrow, 2006; Shaules, 2007) argued that intercultural learning was closely related to a feeling of connectedness to particular cultural communities instead of showing detachment as described by Bennett. Their research showed that acquiring the ability to construe new cultural realities, as described by Bennett, would closely related to entering into deeper relationships with people in the host cultural community (Shaules, 2007).

Sometimes cultural competence is also viewed as an analog to linguistic competence (Keesing, 1981). However, language is just one feature common to all cultures although undoubtedly a chief method for transmission of culture. Non-verbal communication is also important to human interaction and the study of intercultural communication (Barnlund, 1991; Rosenblatt *et al.*, 1995). An understanding of nonverbal behavior is also important to help discern the cues underlying attitudes and values (Hall, 1996). One should also note that nonverbal behavior seldom occurs in isolation; communication includes both verbal and non-verbal aspects and usually a communicator sends nonverbal cues simultaneously which are linked to both the verbal messages and the setting in which the communication takes place (Samovar and Porter, 2004). Given this, language competence can be considered as an analog of cultural competence though maybe not always.

Finally, one wonders if there is such a thing as being bicultural or multicultural. There are no commonly agreed definitions on the term. Paulston (1992) believed that



biculturalism was a highly elusive topic. She identified two facts from her experiences and studies that highlighted the complexity of the issue: (1) bicultural individuals do not agree on whether one can be bicultural, (2) there are different types of bicultural individuals. She argued that “a bicultural individual – unlike a bilingual – although he can function with two sets of performances, has in fact only one set of ‘cultural competence’ and this competence is partially eclectic and shows nowhere near the same conformity between individuals as does linguistic competence” (Paulston 1992: 79). Her personal experience showed that it is possible to learn a foreign language from non-native speakers and it is also possible to become bilingual without being bicultural, apart from the trivialities.

It is also possible for one to learn to function with a different system but dislike it. Even if an individual can appreciate the different values of another culture, Paulston believed that individual would ‘pick and choose’ and there are some aspects of culture that are “beyond modifications” such as one’s attitudes about being on-time or communicative style, i.e. frank and direct against subtle and indirect. Some researchers even believed that “individuality of temperament is a genetic predisposition to react to an environment in certain ways (Edgerton, 1973: 125)”. There are studies supporting that “temperament is largely unyielding to cultural pressure” (Paulston, 1992: 125).

It seems that being bicultural means different things to different people. Definitions of biculturalism are loose. As becoming bicultural is so difficult to define or measure, it will be even more difficult to define or measure multiculturalism in the global village of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The multicultural human may pick and choose the aspects of culture to adapt while s/he can, but somehow stick to the aspects ‘beyond modifications’. S/he may be a ‘marginal man/woman’ who does not identify with a particular culture, or feel particularly connected to some cultural communities. Maybe intercultural success does not necessarily imply biculturalism or multiculturalism and or it may imply merely a fit between the person and the cross-cultural environments concerned.

At issue here is the need for sojourners to be prepared in order to address their own development of cross-cultural competence, and to be supported in this development. How far this was supported in the NETs teachers is explored in the empirical investigation. This part of the developing argument has alluded to the significance not

only of culture shock, and the many areas in which it might occur, but of the need to prepare sojourners for this and to develop their cultural competencies in order to handle this without feeling over-stressed. This, in turn, places an obligation on the host culture to provide support structures and suitable preparation for this in both the sojourners and the host institution. Intercultural learning is an important feature of preparation of NETs teachers; how far this was addressed is explored in the empirical investigation.

## **2.5 RESPONSES TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

Interest in the processes by which individuals cope with acculturative stress has grown dramatically over the past decades (Moos, 1986). To study the coping process, Lazarus and his colleagues develop a measure called Ways of Coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).<sup>1</sup> Two general types of coping are identified. Problem-focused coping aims at doing something to alter the source of the stress, emotion-focus coping aims at managing the emotional distress associated with the situation. Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, they observe that problem-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that the situation must be endured.

This distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping is an important one but has proven to be too simple. Research typically finds that responses to Ways of Coping Scale form several factors rather than just two (Aldwin *et al.*, 1980; Coyne *et al.*, 1981; Parkes, 1986; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Folkman *et al.*, 1986; Scheier *et al.*, 1986; Aldwin & Revenson, 1987). Very often, factors other than problem-focused coping were considered as belonging to emotion-focused coping. However, it was found that some of these factors might diverge quite sharply in character, or even being inversely correlated (Scheier *et al.*, 1986).

For example, some emotion-focused responses involve denial, others involve positive reinterpretation of events, and others involve the seeking out of social support. These responses, so different from each other, might have very different implications for a person's success in coping. Similarly, although problem-focused coping might be

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<sup>1</sup> It is recognized that the work of Lazarus is usually concerned more with trauma, e.g. over bereavement or major life crises, rather than issues of cross-cultural adjustment.

considered as one single process, several distinct activities may be involved, such as planning, taking direction action, seeking assistance, or sometimes even forcing oneself to restrain from taking action. (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987). To study the diversity of potential coping responses separately would be difficult unless feasible ways to measure them were developed separately (Scheier *et al.*, 1986).

Whilst the division into problem-focused and emotion-focused coping would seem to be too general and simplistic, nevertheless the discussion points to the importance of recognizing that participants respond differently to issues of adjustment and adopt a range of coping strategies. It is important, in handling issues of cross-cultural adjustment, for different responses to be able to be recognized and handled differentially. Recognizing that coping strategies address both problem identification and emotional factors indicates that cross-cultural adjustment operates in both cognitive and affective domains, and these areas are explored in the empirical research.

## **2.6 FACTORS AFFECTING CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

For an individual recently arrived in a foreign environment, the daily experiences of loss, miscommunication, loneliness, prejudice, physical discomfort and inconvenience may all become active stressors intermittently or regularly. Individuals may develop psychological symptoms, or experience culture shock in various degrees, as Oberg (1960) stated. The stress of cross-cultural adaptation is costly to international businesses, to volunteer sending agencies, and to the individuals who fail to thrive in the overseas environment. According to earlier research (Tung, 1981), between 16 and 40 % of all American employees sent overseas return from their assignments early, each premature return costs a firm roughly US\$100,000. While premature return rates are significant and highly costly to the parent organizations, a notable share of expatriate managers staying on their jobs are regarded as ineffective and those underperforming staff incur large direct and indirect costs also (Black *et al.*, 1992). It is important, then, to understand the factors that may be affecting people's decisions not to complete a contract, to return early, or to perform less well in a host country. A number of research studies have been conducted on the factors that may affect the cross cultural adjustment process of expatriates in culturally different environments.

### **2.6.1 Personal factors**

Personal factors cover all personal traits such as personality and relational skills, demographic characteristics such as age and gender, as well as individuals' job tenure in an alien culture, their culture-specific knowledge and skills.

As mentioned above, personality based studies have looked at personal traits in order to explain expatriate success (i.e., adjustment). Among them, willingness to communicate, cultural flexibility, positive affectivity, and showing tolerance, etc., were reported collectively to have strong positive effects on three facets of adjustment mentioned above (Black, 1990b; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001b). In contrast, psychological adjustment problems have been associated with the consequences of authoritarian personality, and decrements in overall satisfaction have been related to the consequences of dogmatic behaviour (Taft and Steinkalk, 1985).

Expatriates with high general self-efficacy, meaning a high level of confidence in their job or social ability (Bandura, 1986), or high self-monitoring, which is an individual's ability to adjust his or her behavior to external situational factors (Harrison *et al.*, 1996), and an external locus of control, indicated significantly greater degrees of general, interaction and work adjustment compared to expatriates with low general self-efficacy, low self-monitoring or an internal locus of control (Black, 1990; Harrison *et al.*, 1996; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Ward *et al.*, 1999).

Relational skills have been variously operationalized as communication skills, sociability etc. They had strongest effects on general and interaction adjustment (e.g., Black, 1988; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Selmer, 1999; 2001; Caligiuri, 2000).

There were also suggestions that individuals differ in their coping process due to stable coping "styles" or "dispositions" that they bring with them to the stressful situations. Coping strategies regarded to be functional seem to be linked to personality qualities that are widely regarded as beneficial such as optimism and hardiness. Similarly, coping tendencies hypothesized to be less functional are inversely associated with less desirable personality qualities such as anxiety and low self-esteem (McCrae and Costa, 1996; Carver *et al.*, 1989).

However, it should be noted that studies on personal traits did not always produce consistent results. For example, research on extraversion has generated positive, negative, and non-significant relationships between extraversion and sojourner adjustment (Armes and Ward, 1989; Padilla *et al.*, 1985; Searle and Ward, 1990). The idea that certain personality characteristics predispose people to cope in certain ways when they confront adversity (Cohen & Lazarus, 1973; 1980) is also somewhat controversial. Carver *et al.*, (1989) observed that people tend to adopt certain coping tactics as relatively stable preferences. Rather, coping should perhaps be thought of as a dynamic process that shifted in nature from stage to stage of a stressful transaction instead of being tied to personality differences (Cohen and Lazarus, 1973; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Despite the relatively poor predictive power of personality in cross-cultural adjustment, many believe that it is premature to dismiss its influence on the adjustment process. Ward and Chang (1997) proposed the 'cultural fit' hypothesis. They highlighted the significance of the person x situation interaction and suggested that in many cases it is not personality *per se* that predicts cross-cultural adjustment, but rather the 'cultural-fit' between the acculturating individual and host culture's norms. Hence there is the argument that greater attention should be paid to the person x situation interaction and the notion of cultural fit (Church, 1982; Furham and Bochner, 1986).

Demographic factors have been widely examined in relation to migration stress and coping, the most widely studied demographic variables are gender, age, educational level, family factors, tenure in foreign operation, and previous international experience (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1991; Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Caligiuri *et al.*, 1989; Selmer, 2001a; 2001b), to assess the role of gender on intercultural experience. As Hofstede (1980) found, gender roles vary by culture and organizations utilizing expatriates tend to show reluctance in sending women overseas as they are perceived to have run a higher risk of psychological symptomatology (Beiser, 1988; Furnham and Li, 1993).

However, Harris (2002) and Adler (1994) found that a majority of expatriate women stated that being a woman had a positive or neutral impact on their effectiveness overseas. Others reported poorer adjustment in men (Boski, 1990; 1994). Some others found little differentiation in the work life experiences of female and male expectations

(Hebard, 1996; McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002). In terms of coping, it is generally observed that there are no significant gender differences in the reported use of the various coping strategies except that women tend to focus more on venting emotions, seek social support, both for instrumental and emotional reasons, while men tend to use alcohol and drugs as a way of emotion-focused coping (Carver *et al.*, 1989).

Research findings on age and adjustment are also somewhat ambiguous. Some studies reported that age has no relation to expatriate adjustment (Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). Other studies reported that younger persons cope better than older persons (Church, 1982). Moreover, Beiser *et al.* (1988) suggested that there might be a curvilinear relationship between age and adjustment in that adolescence and old age are higher risk periods as the stress of migration may be intertwined with the stress of adolescent identity and development. It may be that culture learning is more difficult for older people who have fewer psychological resources to manage a successful transition. These seemingly contradictory results may be influenced by imprecise and variable definitions of 'young' and 'old' within and across samples (Ward *et al.*, 2001).

Education, occupation and income have also been considered as influential factors on cross cultural adjustment. Education is associated with better adjustment and lower level of stress (Jayasuriya *et al.*, 1992) as education is linked to other resources such as culture-specific knowledge and skills and to socioeconomic assets such as higher status occupations and greater income (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Although both occupation and income may serve as buffers against stress, attention has been directed towards the relational analysis of status mobility. Downward social mobility has been associated with an increase in psychological problems (Dohrenward and Dohrenward, 1974).

While some research found that family related variables, such as marital adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996), spouse support (Li, 1995), and family perceptions of the move (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1998), were unrelated to adjustment, others found that an expatriate's family experience becomes very much a part of his or her success or failure in assimilating into the new environment and performing well in the international assignment (Harvey, 1982, 1985; Tung, 1981, 1982; Aycan, 1997). Many researchers and writers have noted that the difficulty for family adjustment to the new environment is greater than that for the expatriate (Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Solomon, 1994;

McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). Recent studies perceived value in having their spouse and family receive training in cross-cultural adjustment (Mukuda, 2001).

Length of tenure in foreign operations was found to be positively related to general and work adjustment (e.g., Gregersen & Black, 1990; 1991; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001), which means that the longer expatriates are stationed in a foreign country, the more comfortable they feel with local culture and work.

Culture-specific knowledge and skills provide the foundation for effective intercultural interactions and facilitate psychological adaptation to new sociocultural environments (Scott and Scott, 1991; Ward *et al.*, 2001). One way to acquire knowledge and skills is through prior experience. However, effects of previous international experience on adjustment have been mixed. For example, Selmer (2001; 2002) and Klineberg and Hull (1979) reported positive relationships between previous international experience and all three dimensions of adjustment, i.e. general, interaction and work adjustments. Parker and McEvoy (1993) reported the same effect, but only with the general adjustment. In contrast, many others reported previous international experience to be unrelated to expatriate adjustment (e.g., Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Dunbar, 1994; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). This may imply the need to consider the measure of previous international experience. Researchers have generally assessed previous international experience in terms of the number of previous assignments or length of experience. It may be better to consider it in terms of culturally related or unrelated experience, and cultural similarity, which tells whether the experience is gained from a similar culture (Selmer, 2002).

Some research found that knowledge is more important to adjustment than experiences. Researchers found that knowledge of the host culture in the pre-departure stage is positively related to general adjustment (Black, 1988; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). According to some studies, training may be considered important to cross-cultural adjustment (Desphande and Viswesvaran, 1992; Weaver, 1993). Training is not only the instrument to gain knowledge of the host environment, but it also can help form accurate expatriate expectations and results in greater satisfaction and adjustment (Porter & Steers, 1973; Caligiuri, 2000).

However, data on training have also produced mixed results. Some studies, like that of Bennett (1986), found that even if cross cultural training tools are well produced and used correctly, learners are still likely to experience a degree of disorientation and confusion as they struggle with the implications of day-to-day experience in the new environment, and many organizations believed cross cultural training programmes were not effective (Tung, 1981; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Dowling & Schuler, 1990).

Researchers emphasized the importance of gathering accurate information about strangers and warned of the possibility of reinforcing stereotypes of strangers when inaccurate information was provided through training (Wilson and Dalton, 1998). As the phenomenon of cross-cultural interactions is so complicated, it may not be practical to identify a single pattern, or model of adjustment to fit all situations or all expatriates (Weaver, 1993). Gudykust and Kim (2003) highlighted the importance of remaining open to new information and willing to modify the stereotypes when interacting with strangers.

Fluency in host countries' foreign languages was expected to contribute to higher levels of interaction adjustment because people with efficient host-country language will have more opportunities to gain information about the novel situation, and according to stress management theory, this will reduce the uncertainty (Brislin, 1981). However, some studies (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001) reported a strong relationship between host country language fluency and interaction adjustment whereas others (e.g. Kealey, 1989; Li, 1995; Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001) failed to find strong evidence to support it. Taft (1989) suggested that it might be related to the higher expectations of bilingual foreigners for friendship and hosts' attitudes. Ward *et al.* (2001) believed this highlighted the significance of personal and situational factors on adjustment and considered the interaction of at least three variables: language fluency, expectations and hosts' reactions. It may imply the need to consider the language similarity (Caligiuri, 2001) and the host country nationals' foreign language skills, specifically the ability to speak the expatriate's language.

The issue of 'cultural fit' is important, for it suggests that, in handling cross-cultural adjustment, it is necessary to look at the variety of factors, including personality and personal factors, that impact on a specific person's ability to fit into the host culture.



These are explored in the empirical investigation. Further, the section has indicated the importance of pre-departure preparation and induction, in order to identify key issues in the mind of the sojourners, and to address these before the actual arrival date. However, it has also indicated that preparation alone is not sufficient to address issues of cross-cultural adjustment, and that a range of issues present themselves to the sojourner upon arrival; hence, in the case of the NETs, it is important for the sojourner not only to be prepared adequately for cross-cultural adjustment prior to taking up the post, but also that there is a need for continuing support and follow-up during the period of time of the contract.

### **2.6.2 Workplace factors**

Job features have been extensively studied and many were found to influence work adjustment and general adjustment. For example, role clarity, role discretion, role conflict, role novelty and role overload have been identified as work-related stressors because they generate uncertainty and ambiguity about jobs in a new cultural environment (Lance & Richardson, 1988; Black and Gregersen, 1991a; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Taylor & Napier, 1996; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999).

However, there is mixed evidence in support of the claims. For example, according to role transition theory, high role novelty may cause a stressful experience (Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993; Black, 1991). Some studies report a negative relationship between role novelty and work adjustment (e.g., Black, 1988; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001), while others found no relationship (Black, 1988; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Stroh *et al.*, 1994; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). Nicholson and Imaizumi (1993) argued that role novelty is focused narrowly on work and cannot reflect the impact of culture novelty on one's identity.

The presence of social support is negatively correlated with the emergence of psychiatric symptomatology in immigrants (Lin *et al.*, 1979; Bieser, 1988); its absence is associated with the increased probability of physical and mental illness during cross-cultural sojourns (Hammer, 1987). However, other investigations have pointed to a link between more extensive host national contact and increased psychological distress (Ward and Kennedy, 1993a; 1993b; Grove & Torbiorn, 1993) and higher levels of stress, fatigue, loneliness, and a stronger desire to go home (Paige, 1993) as these sojourners lack the chance to reconfirm their cultural identity (Paige, 1993). The

relative merit of co-national versus host national support emerges as a controversial topic. In effect, co-national relationships can be harmful or helpful, depending on the nature of individual supporters and their group's dynamics (Ward *et al.*, 2001).

Leader-member exchange (LMX) refers to the quality of the interpersonal exchange relationship between an employee and his/her supervisor (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Kraimer, Wayne and Jaworski (2001) found that LMX positively influences work adjustment by providing social support in terms of aid, affect or affirmation. Aid entails providing relevant information and assistance to the expatriate in order to reduce his/her stress and help him/her make sense of the work environment. In other words, expatriates of a high quality LMX relationship should receive instrumental support such as information, affective social support or affirmation from supervisors. However, the authors may have focused on the relationship between the expatriates and their supervisors, but ignored the relationship between expatriates and their HCN subordinates.

Finally, scholars (Guzzo, Noonan, and Elron, 1994; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Shaffer, *et al.*, 1999) found that the overall perceived organizational support from the parent company was positively related to the expatriate's work, general, and interaction adjustment.

It is very clear from the preceding discussion that workplace factors exert a significant influence on a sojourner's cross-cultural adjustment. This is a major feature of the interviews in the empirical research.

### **2.6.3 Environmental factors**

Research generally supports the view that the greater the difference between the host country's culture or living conditions and the home country's culture or living conditions, the more difficult the adjustment process is likely to be (Black & Gregersen, 1991a; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2002).

However, evidence for the relationship between some environmental factors such as cultural novelty and general adjustment has been mixed. Some reported a positive correlation (Black and Gregersen, 1991a; Parker and McEvoy, 1993); others (e.g., Black, 1990) have reported significant negative associations with all three dimensions

of adjustment. Further research on cultural novelty is needed to examine these contradictory findings.

Zeitlin (1996) suggested that levels of culture shock might be predictable, based on differences in cultural values. While the attempt to map levels of differences between many different cultures is an interesting concept, doing so based on value differences alone may be biased especially when value is an abstract concept that may be difficult to measure. Other objective aspects that can be observed, like physical and relational conditions, may provide valuable supplementary data in predicting levels of culture shock.

Social, political and economic characteristics of the society of settlement may also affect cross cultural adjustment. Korn-Ferry International (1981) noted that American expatriates were most satisfied with assignments within Europe. Yoshida *et al.* (1997) reported that Japanese expatriates experienced more positive mood and higher levels of life satisfaction in American, compared with Egyptian, postings. These findings may be limited to a specific type of sojourners who were employed by multinational companies. There has been some earlier research that indicated that morale and satisfaction of Peace Corps volunteers are higher in rural locales where traditional patterns of indigenous culture are more consistently observed (Guskin, 1966). The contradictory result may be a result of interaction between the characteristics of the individual in transition, the acculturating group, the culture of origin, and the culture of settlement that affects the adjustment process (Ward *et al.*, 2001).

It has become clear that, whilst major spheres of cross-cultural adjustment can be identified, there is no single or simple answer to the question of how easily a sojourner adjusts to a different cultural context. Indeed, the argument has been developed that the ease with which a sojourner makes cross-cultural adjustments is a function of the individual interplay of the external factors identified, mediated by the personality and personal factors residing within each sojourner, and that this interplay is different for each sojourner. The external factors operate at several levels, for example: departmental and institutional (in the workplace); community/society/location; political and valuate in the host culture. This, in turn, suggests that the empirical research needs to examine the issues of cross-cultural adjustment through the eyes of each individual sojourner, and the study here addresses this feature.

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

The various literatures provide an important background for this study. According to statistics, more and more people are moving temporarily across countries and regions for study or work purposes. There are many variables that relate to the personal psychology of individuals in cultural contexts. The phenomenon of culture shock has been widely discussed, a list of symptoms have been identified, it is also pointed out that individuals differ greatly in the degree to which culture shock affects them, and there are individuals who cannot live in foreign countries. However, the prediction of culture shock is often elusive.

The outcomes of cross-cultural contact may vary greatly. Individuals may separate themselves from the host culture, live marginally in the host society, opt to assimilate or integrate into the host society. Recent research also finds that individuals may also relate to the host country in different modes at different time, adopting a mode of cultural hybridity. Different patterns of cross-cultural adjustment have been identified in the literature, it may be a U-curve, W-curve, which is continual and cyclic in nature or simply a linear line. Researchers acknowledge variations in cross-cultural adjustment but argue about the precise pattern of change.

Interest in the processes by which individuals cope with the cultural differences has grown dramatically over the past decades. Research finds out that in response to differences in a cultural environment, individuals will normally adopt problem-focused coping strategy when the situation can be changed; however, emotional-focused coping is preferred when there is nothing much to do to alter the reality.

A number of factors have been studied in relation to cross-cultural adjustments. Personal factors include personal traits, age, marital status, tenure of overseas assignments, educational and income level, prior experiences, knowledge or skills. Work place factors include job features, role novelty, social contextual or organizational contextual variables. Lastly environmental factors include cultural novelty, standard of living, living conditions or development level of host country. Nevertheless, results of research are often mixed, it is not easy to identify a common set of factors that will definitely lead to successful cross-cultural adjustments or hamper the process.

The various literatures reviewed here provide an important background for the empirical dimension of this study. The examination of the literature led to the identification of a scarcity of research on NETs voluntarily living or working in a foreign culture in Hong Kong, and the issues of cross-cultural adjustment that are relevant in this field.. These studies were useful in informing the questions asked during the interview process in the empirical study.

The literature has suggested the following issues need to be explored in the empirical investigation that follows: the conception of culture and its relevance to this age of globalization, the types of immigrants, culture, being a multi-dimensional concept and the source of many cultural confusion, conflicts, misunderstandings and frustration; understanding the types of migrants and the various dimensions of cross-cultural contact; a range of psychological theories of cross-cultural adjustment that complement each other; outcomes of cross-cultural contact that underlines the significance of NETs having accurate perception of the situation in that their cross-cultural adjustment is inductive and sensitive; responses to cross-cultural contact and the factors that may affect the results. Lastly, the concept of intercultural competence is also seen to have an influence on cross-cultural adjustment, and the argument has suggested that this can be prepared for in advance of the sojourner's taking up a post but that it is also important to provide ongoing support once a sojourner is in post.

In particular, the different theories of cross-cultural adjustment, possible outcome and responses of contacts, ways of responding, and factors affecting the adjustment process were thoroughly explored during the data gathering process. By understanding these issues, it is possible to gather useful information to help understand the experiences and responses of the native-speaking English teachers in Hong Kong. The next chapter will focus on data analyses and discussion on research findings.

The thesis recognises that school culture may have a significant impact on non-NET-teacher behaviour and NET behaviour. However, this is the dimension which, whilst recognized, will only be addressed if the participants themselves raise it, i.e. while it is seen as important, for this thesis it will not be central. One of the boundaries of the thesis then is the phenomenon will be investigated through the eyes of the participants

rather than factoring in all the possible variables that may have a bearing on their cross-cultural adjustment.

The argument has been developed that how well a sojourner makes cross-cultural adjustments is the result of the unique interplay of the external factors identified together with, indeed mediated by, the personality and personal factors residing within each sojourner. This suggests that the empirical research must adopt an *emic* rather than *etic* analysis, i.e., it needs to examine the issues of cross-cultural adjustment through the eyes and experiences of each individual sojourner, rather than through the imposition of a standard, for example numerical, predetermined, and closed set of questionnaire items. The study here addresses this feature.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 RESEARCH PURPOSES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Chapter one of this thesis indicated that the overall aim of the empirical research was to understand the experiences, perceptions and responses of NETS in respect of cross-cultural adjustment in Hong Kong. To operationalize this requires the identification of a limited number of research objectives and research questions. The research objectives were set out in chapter one, thus:

- To look at the reasons why policies for NETs in Hong Kong might not work as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention;
- To apply theories of cross-cultural adjustment to explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong and in order to explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively;
- To make recommendations for interventions to improve the operations of the NETs scheme;
- To give insights into the key issue of cross-cultural adjustment, from the points of views of the participants, in order to increase the success of policy implementation;
- To indicate how this major and expensive government policy initiative might fulfill its potential by taking account of a neglected area heretofore (i.e. cross-cultural adjustment).

To address these objectives five research questions were formulated, one for each objective, thus:

1. Why might the policies for NETs in Hong Kong not be working as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention?
2. How far can theories of cross-cultural adjustment explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs

- in Hong Kong and explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively?
3. What recommendations for interventions can be made to improve the operations of the NETs scheme?
  4. What insights into cross-cultural adjustment are given by NETs that might increase the success of the NET policy implementation?
  5. How can the government policy for NETs fulfill its potential by taking account of cross-cultural adjustment?

To investigate these five research questions, an empirical study was conducted with selected NETs in Hong Kong, discussed below, employing a qualitative study. In qualitative studies, research questions must be focused on a phenomenon or intellectual issue of interest that enable the researcher to learn more (Jones, 2002). The research objective was to learn more about the experiences of a group of native-speaking English teachers who participated in the HKSAR government's NET scheme to teach in the local primary or secondary schools. These teachers voluntarily made the decision to experience a different culture in an alien environment.

### **3.2 RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

In order to answer the research questions, given that they addressed perceptions and responses of NETs in Hong Kong, it was considered appropriate to use a qualitative style of research, as this would address the context-specificity of the participants and also their reactions to the situation in which they found themselves.

As indicated in previous chapters, no study has been conducted to explore the cross-cultural adjustment and ways of responding of native-speaking English teachers in Hong Kong since the launch of the NET scheme. There is also a scarcity of research on the cross-cultural experiences of cross-cultural professionals in Asian countries. In order to address this, this research utilized a qualitative approach together with several aspects of the tools of grounded theory to explore the experiences of this group of professionals and the ways in which they responded to the changes in a culturally different Asian environment.

A full grounded theory approach (e.g. as in Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was *not* utilized in this research, as, in a grounded theory approach, the theory *emerges* from the data rather than, as in this study, the testing of a theory from the data. In the present study



the data are used to ‘test’ a hypothesis, whereas in a true grounded theory the *end point* of the grounded theory is the hypothesis. However, this does not mean that the *tools* of grounded theory cannot be utilized, for example, coding, constant comparison, theoretical saturation, the identification of core categories, theoretical sampling; in the study here these tools were used for processing and analyzing the data. Concomitant with this was the use of strategies for qualitative data analysis from Miles and Huberman (1984), e.g. coding, axial coding, identifying clusters and patterns of concepts, in order to address data reduction through careful data display (e.g. in tabular form).

Hence the methodology used here was premised on qualitative approaches. Qualitative research methods, being exploratory and inductive in nature, are particularly suitable to uncover how people make sense of their experiences and behaviors (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Qualitative data are systematically gathered and analyzed using a range of analytical tools (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

A review of previous research on expatriate cross-cultural sojourners indicates a considerable gap in understanding the experience of voluntary western expatriate professionals working in East Asia. The predominance of positivistic designs in studying the phenomena of expatriate cross-cultural sojourners means that there have been inadequate investigations of their experiences, feelings, and the context. Wuest, (2000) pointed out that the symbolic interactionist underpinning many qualitative approaches reflect an inherent respect for people’s subjective interpretations of social experience. By giving the participant a voice, qualitative approaches gives value to individual participants and allows the researcher the privilege of understanding the reality through interpreting their experiences. Indeed Cohen *et al* (2007: 167-8) set out several principles underpinning qualitative approaches:

- humans actively construct their own meanings of situations;
- . . . behaviour and, thereby, data are socially situated, context-related, context-dependent and context-rich. To understand a situation researchers need to understand the context because situations affect behaviour and perspectives and *vice versa*;
- realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic;

- research must include ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) of the contextualized behaviour;
- people are deliberate, intentional and creative in their actions;
- history and biography intersect – we create our own futures but not necessarily in situations of our own choosing;
- social research needs to examine situations through the eyes of the participants – the task of ethnographies, as Malinowski (1922: 25) observed, is to grasp the point of view of the native [*sic*], his [*sic*] view of the world and in relation to his life;
- . . . generalizability is interpreted as generalizability to identifiable, specific settings and subjects rather than universally;
- . . . people, situations, events and objects have meaning conferred upon them rather than possessing their own intrinsic meaning;
- . . . all factors, rather than a limited number of variables, have to be taken into account;
- . . . Purposive sampling enables the full scope of issues to be explored.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 167-8)

Cohen *et al.* (*ibid.*) are arguing for the need to catch individualized, context-rich data about situations as seen through the eyes of the participants (interpretive approaches), and, indeed this was exactly what was done in the research in this present study, using the participants’ interpretations/definitions of the situation. Indeed, the interactionist perspective is important in this study, as cross-cultural adjustment occurs through interactions, or, indeed, their lack.

Qualitative approaches also enable researchers to attend to minute changes in the process of cross-cultural adjustment, which was described as the analyst’s way of explaining changes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (1983) remarked that by looking for processes, researchers delineate how events are related to each other.

Lastly, qualitative approaches provide opportunities for participants to share their own voices, enable insights to be gathered into the subjective experiences that may have implications for policy makers, in this particular case, in formulating changes to the NET scheme where necessary.

The approach used here took account of how the cross-cultural adjustment took place with the participants over time, how it was ‘emergent’ rather than fixed, and how the phenomenon of adjustment evolved over time. (Becker, 1998; May, 1987; Wuest, 2000). In this study, the purpose was to understand the experiences and responses of native-speaking English teachers living and working in an Asian cultural environment in order to understand difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment and where interventions might be targeted to improve this situation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Wuest , 2000).

Within qualitative approaches to research, it is recognized that the researcher often has an influence on the research, the data gathered and the analysis of the data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 171), i.e. the researcher is already part of the social world that is being researched. In conducting research, then, the researcher has to be aware of his or her own influence on the research and on the participants. Put more formally, the researcher interprets the interpretations of the world placed on the world by the participants, i.e. there is a ‘double hermeneutic’ at work (Giddens, 1976), and so the researcher has to be aware of his own role in the research: the issue of reflexivity (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 171), indeed has to disclose his or her own possible biases, feelings, values (and, this is addressed in the data analysis, where at several points the analysis includes the personal reflections of the researcher). For this reason, part of the data analysis uses the first person, active voice rather than the third person, passive voice (as also in the following example).

As human beings, researchers are subject to the influence of their beliefs, attitudes, backgrounds, and perspectives when they conduct qualitative analyses. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) mentioned that qualitative studies emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality as researchers combine their beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology. They compared qualitative researchers to those who do bricolage projects and explained: “[t]he interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003: 133). Eisner (1998) cautioned that “[q]ualitative research methodology in general...provides greater space for the researcher’s personal inclinations, and greater potential for heterogeneity” (Eisner, 1998: 45).

Given the importance of reflexivity, and because of the extensive time needed with the participants in the process of conducting the interviews, it was necessary for me, the 'primary' or 'sole' data collector, to minimize and recognize any potential researcher bias that might affect the data collection and subsequent analyses. Merriam (1998) suggested the qualitative researcher has to be flexible enough to respond to any unexpected events during the interviews, which could be achieved by employing several methodologies.

Firstly, the researcher should always query and ask questions about the data collected (e.g., who, when, why, where, what, how, timing, etc.). For example, when an informant said he felt being welcomed in Hong Kong right from the beginning, he was asked to elaborate on details like why and what incidents have made him feel so. In addition, a single word, phrase or sentence could carry many different meanings and all these interpretations should be thoroughly examined and considered before a final choice was made (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Merriam, 1998). For example, when describing the scale of changes at school as "little" or "small", it was clarified that the NET conceived that only insignificant proposals on changes, like the format or colour scheme of work sheet, would be approved by his school without causing much hassle or conflicts.

Being a non-native-speaking English teacher in Hong Kong, I deliberately tried not to mingle my feelings about living and working in this Asian environment in order to try to reduce researcher bias. For example, when informants honestly shared with me the negative things they observed in Hong Kong, such as the money-mindedness and impoliteness of the people, I did not provide personal opinions to indicate my agreement or disagreements to their remarks, nor did I try to explain or justify the local culture from my perspectives. I would just nod my head and remain as open as possible to encourage their frank sharing without making them worry about saying something that could make me feel offensive as a local. 'Member checking' was also adopted by engaging them in reviewing and correcting the interview transcripts and subsequent analyses. Throughout the process of the interviews, I was careful not to form judgments of each participant's situations and responses. The researcher just assumed that all native-speaking English teachers chose the reaction strategies that worked best for them and that this study did not judge participants' decisions and actions.

Before listening to the experiences of the NETs, I had expected them to share views only about the differences or negative aspects of life in Hong Kong as mentioned and revealed in the newspaper reports and literature. However, most of them shared with me their positive perceptions towards their sojourns and some mentioned about observing similarities between the host culture and their home culture as a factor that had facilitated their adjustments. Research questions were refined to ask informants about both the differences and similarities as well as the positive and negative things they had experienced. From these data, it was expected that problems of cross-cultural adjustment and dissonance would be able to be identified and inferred. Although not specified in my selection criteria, I wished to have an equal balance of female and male participants to have a view from the voices of the two genders. I anticipated there might be more female and male participants as the former are often thought to be more willing to share their inner feelings. It turned out that 2/3 of my participants were male teachers although female participants were much more communicative verbally as the interviews with them averaged about 2 hours compared to 1 hour with the male informants.

Moreover, through the interviews and contacts, I learnt of many positive rather than negative factors that had facilitated the NETs' stay in Hong Kong. For example, I did not expect that attractive monetary rewards and the naughty but lovely children would be important factors that caused the NETs to stay teaching there. As the interviews continued, early data generated more questions relevant to the research objectives to investigate the phenomenon in more details. These drove me to add more questions.

Hence the rationale underpinning the approach, the methodology, adopted here was rooted in the umbrella of qualitative, non-positivist styles of research, using interpretive, interactionist and ethnographic techniques to examine the situation of cross-cultural adjustment through the eyes of the participants and in their own terms, taking account of the contextually-rich, 'thick descriptions' of the situations in which they found themselves, and also taking account of the researcher's own role in the interviews, such that reflexivity was a requirement in order to address the implications of the 'double hermeneutic' operating in the situation.

### 3.3 INSTRUMENTATION

To allow in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, this research gathered data in two ways, a major and minor way. The minor way was by gathering numerical data on attrition rates in NETs and by referring to media reports of attrition problems, to indicate that there was, indeed a problem, and these data were reported in chapter one. The major way for data collection for the empirical research was from semi-structured interviews with NETs.

The semi-structured interview had the attraction of having a set of common topics for all participants, but the sequence of the topics could be followed in any order to suit the evolution of each interview and to be responsive to the individual participant, provided that all the topics were covered by the end of the interview (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 353). Further, by asking open-ended questions, the respondent is able to answer in her or his own terms, i.e. an authentic response is gained (*ibid.*).

Interviews are a major data collection method in qualitative research through which extensive amount of thick, rich, personal data are gathered.

The location of the interview was chosen according to the convenience of each participant. Through interviews, a variety of important data comprising personal, first-hand information from the participating teachers was gathered. Participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their feelings, beliefs and opinions about their current situations and past events. In qualitative research, the researcher attempts to explore the experiences of individual participants and place them in context (Brown *et al.*, 2002). Two types of interviews are commonly used in grounded theory, semi-structured or completely open-ended formats. Typically “probes” and ‘prompts’ are used by the researcher in response to an interviewee’s answer, prompts to clarify the issue in the participant’s mind, and probes to explore the issue in greater depth (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study and open-ended questions and follow-up probes were asked as appropriate.

Following Strauss and Corbin’s (1989) suggestion that initial interview questions might be supported by literature, the researcher produced an interview guide with reference to the literature relevant to this study (see Appendix B and below). Once the process of data collection begins, additional features may be added, and in the research

here, this was the case, though the additional features concerned the probes and the prompts rather than the core substance of the interviews, i.e. as new concepts emerge from data they can be probed at interview.

Qualitative interviewing develops a flexible outline of topics and questions, and moves from broad to more specific questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As such, the structure of an interview guide should be flexible enough to respond to each individual participant. For example, initially I aimed at learning how NETs felt about living and working in a culturally different environment after they had started living and working in Hong Kong. The first interviewee shared with me the change of her attitudes towards the place and the people, from being extremely negative to tremendously positive. I realized there would be changes in their perspectives over time and so added the probing question “*Are your feelings towards the people and things here changing with time?*” Similarly, after hearing the first two interviewees’ sharing their views on “personal discovery” and “knowing myself” in the processes, I added a question “*In what ways do you think you have changed?*” These were probes, and left the core features untouched.

The study specifically explored the following issues during the interview process:

- (a) What are the major differences (or similarities) between the host and co-host cultures of the native-speaking English teachers observed and experienced after they arrived in Hong Kong and Hong Kong schools?
- (b) In what different ways did they respond (e.g. cognitively and affectively) to the cultural differences and consequent changes that they had to make, in respect of the living and working environments, and the possible reasons for their responses?
- (c) How would they describe their experiences after working and living here for some time?
- (d) What suggestions did they have for the government or schools to facilitate the adjustment of the NETs to their work and life in Hong Kong and what advice would they give to prospective NETs who are considering working in Hong Kong?

These questions were addressed in the main interview schedule (see Appendix B for the prompts and probes):

- a. How long have you been living and teaching in Hong Kong? What has driven you to come to teach in Hong Kong?
- b. What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?
- c. Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?
- d. How would you normally respond or what would you normally do when you encounter changes such as those you've mentioned above?
- e. What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong Kong?
- f. What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?
- g. What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?
- h. Overall, do you enjoy your experiences here in Hong Kong? If you have the opportunity to choose again, will you opt to come to Hong Kong? Do you intend to stay longer?
- i. What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

The number of items was deliberately kept small in the interview schedule in order to enable respondents to have time and space to respond in their preferred ways and to open up issues that they wished to open up, and also to enable probes to be conducted where deemed appropriate. In the event this worked effectively, as the interviews, even focused on this limited number of questions, lasted between one and two hours.

In order to ensure that the five research questions set out at the start of this chapter were addressed in the interviews, a matching exercise was undertaken, as in Table 3.1.



Table 3.1: Matching research questions with interview questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTION
1. Why might the policies for NETs in Hong Kong not be working as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?</li> <li>(b) Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(c) What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?</li> <li>(d) What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(e) What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</li> </ul>
2. How far can theories of cross-cultural adjustment explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong and explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) How long have you been living and teaching in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(b) What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?</li> <li>(c) Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(d) How would you normally respond or what would you normally do when you encounter changes such as those you've mentioned above?</li> <li>(e) What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(f) What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(g) What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</li> </ul>
3. What recommendations for interventions can be made to improve the operations of the NETs scheme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?</li> <li>(b) What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(c) What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?</li> <li>(d) What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?</li> </ul>

Table 3.1/continued

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTION
4. What insights into cross-cultural adjustment are given by NETs that might increase the success of the NET policy implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?</li> <li>(b) Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(c) How would you normally respond or what would you normally do when you encounter changes such as those you've mentioned above?</li> <li>(d) What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(e) What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?</li> <li>(f) What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(g) What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</li> </ul>
5. How can the government policy for NETs fulfill its potential by taking account of cross-cultural adjustment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(b) How would you normally respond or what would you normally do when you encounter changes such as those you've mentioned above?</li> <li>(c) What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong Kong?</li> <li>(d) What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?</li> <li>(e) What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?</li> </ul>

Table 3.1 indicates that content validity has been addressed (discussed below) in that the issues of interest are explored in depth and breadth, and also that a form of concurrent validity has been addressed in that the same interview question serves more than one research question (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 137). Further, field notes were taken during and after each interview. These served as supplementary records of the specific environmental situations, non-verbal communications, general observations and impressions of the interviews as remembered by the researcher (*ibid.*). This allowed the interview data to be triangulated in another way (discussed below: reliability).

Gaining access and collecting data from the nine native-speaking English teachers was an important issue (details of the sampling are discussed below). As both the researcher and these teachers were working full-time, scheduling a time to meet was always problematic. While the teachers were officially off from work after four or five o'clock in the afternoon, the researcher had to work till some seven or eight o'clock in the evening during the weekdays. Hence, the most feasible time for conducting the interviews was either Saturday or Sunday afternoons. However, it was thought that some NETs might lose interest in participating in the interviews as they would not want to sacrifice a weekend afternoon to take part in an interview with a stranger. To overcome this obstacle, once a NET graciously agreed to meet for the interview, the time and locations of meeting were chosen by the participants to suit their convenience without regard to the traveling distance and time required of the researcher, who attempted to be as efficient and cooperative as possible with each participant.

The interviews took place over a three-month period. It was a lengthy and weighty process as many data had to be collected. Interviews were conducted until theoretical saturation was achieved. In total, nine one-on-one interviews were conducted, ranging from 60 to 180 minutes each. Due to the cultural differences between the researcher and the participants, sometimes I, as the researcher, might not be able to grasp or understand the emotions and meanings of the participants accurately. For example, when Daniel said he had “soaked up lots of the things we see around”, I did not quite catch his meaning and sought immediate clarification. He explained that his family tried to immerse themselves in the local culture, such as going to the local concerts, museums, and even participated in the demonstration for democracy in Hong Kong. When Trudy said she felt stressful when

she first worked here, I asked her to explain in more detail her experiences. She cited concrete examples like finding herself being “locked in a high rise building”, where there was “no garden”, “no playground for children”. I would not have understood her feeling as Hongkongers had taken all these for granted in such a small but congested area. To minimize misinterpretations, I employed member “data checking” throughout the process by inviting them to review and correct the transcriptions and analyses.

### **3.4 SAMPLING**

Qualitative inquiry provides clear guidelines on sampling strategies (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Cohen *et al.*, 2007), including purposeful sampling, network sampling and criterion sampling.

Purposeful sampling offers the opportunity for selecting information-rich cases that contribute to a thorough inquiry (Patton, 2002). Network sampling, also described as chain or snowball sampling, can be conducted when information rich cases are obtained through personal referrals or recommendations (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling enables the researcher to select participants that meet the certain criteria to be included in the study (Jones, 2002; Patton, 2002). In this research the population of NETS in Hong Kong was sampled. Such non-probability samples addressed the issue of gathering data from deliberately chosen, ‘knowledgeable people’ (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 97).

The NETs were approached on the basis of their ‘fitness for purpose’ rather than their representativeness of the spectrum of opinion. They were ‘critical cases’ (*ibid.*) and the purpose in contacting them was to acquire in-depth information on the issues in question of cross-cultural adjustment (they were insiders to the situation and had lived with it), and they were in a position to comment on the issue of cross-cultural adjustment authentically. Their experiences made them suitable cases to address the purposes of the research. Whilst it is recognized that purposeful sampling, like other non-probability samples, has limited generalizability (Cohen *et al.*, 2007), this was not seen as a problem, as the intention was to address key issues in cross-cultural adjustment as seen through the eyes of participants.

This research also achieved purposeful sampling by adopting the approach termed ‘theoretical sampling’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Seale, 1999; Locke, 2001; Patton, 2002). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that in the process of theoretical sampling, the researcher will collect, code and analyze the data and decide which data to collect next and where to find them. Theoretical sampling permits the researcher to broaden the scope of the emerging theory through choosing cases to study, people to interview, and setting to observe until categories are saturated (Seale, 1999). Hence the sampling includes not only people but *issues*, and in the case here the research ensured that both people and issues were sampled.

Theoretical sampling gives depth to the research by maximizing the opportunity to compare events (Patton, 2002). It is a continuous process. In the beginning of the sampling process, as many themes will emerge as possible. As the research progresses, theoretical sampling focuses on consolidating and ‘saturating’ categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), i.e. concluding the data collection when new data no longer add to, or modify, the theoretical explanation that is being put forward. In other words, theoretical sampling continues until all levels of the codes are found to be saturated and no new conceptual information emerges to indicate the existence of new codes or possible expansion of established codes, with no contradictions or discrepancies remaining unexplained. In this research, with the data from these nine participants, it was found that all of the categories were thoroughly saturated. A conceptual framework was then developed and verified by further data collected. No additional cases were necessary, and theoretical sampling occurred. The researcher is then able to determine how much variation in a category occurs through its properties and dimensions. As Strauss (1987) mentions:

Theoretical sampling is a means whereby the analyst decides on analytic grounds what data to collect next and where to find them. The basic question in theoretical sampling is: what groups or subgroups of populations, events, activities (to find varying dimensions, strategies, etc) does one turn to next in data collection. And for what theoretical purpose? So, this process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory.

(Strauss, 1987: 103)

While this thesis addressed the key elements of cross-cultural adjustment as discussed in the literature review, given the scope of the thesis, the researcher took the decision only to focus on one particular party involved i.e. the NETs, rather than all the possible stakeholders e.g. the school, teachers in the department, the EDB, the spouses, the students. By doing this, the researcher recognized the possible one-sidedness of the data; on the other hand, by confining the study to one party in particular, this would enable rich data from their perceptions to be gathered.

In order to understand the experiences of the native-speaking English teachers living and working in Hong Kong and the ways in which they coped with the cultural changes, NETs recruited through the HK NET scheme were identified and selected. The participants were selected from both local primary and secondary schools in order to ensure coverage of age groups taught and, thereby, different kinds of school. The teachers in the sample were selected using purposive, network, and criterion sampling.

First, network sampling was employed to identify a potential pool of participants. Inquiries were sent to the researcher's friends teaching in local primary or secondary schools, explaining the purpose and nature of the study, describing the criteria for inclusion and asking for suggested participants. The initial selection criterion was that all the native-speaking English teachers in the sample had to be recruited through the HKSAR government's NET scheme. Hence, the teachers had to be teaching in the local primary or secondary schools rather than private language institutes or international schools.

To widen the sample, emails were also sent to expatriates via the Asia expatriate website, a website frequently visited by expatriates looking for jobs or opportunities in Hong Kong. Criterion sampling was stringently employed in this phase to ensure that only expatriate teachers who had met the pre-set criteria would be invited to participate. The most important criterion, as mentioned above, was that the NETs had to have been recruited to teach in either a primary or secondary school in Hong Kong through the HKSAR government's NET scheme. 14 NETs responded, and nine of those fitted the requirement.

Once a pool of appropriate candidates was established, purposive sampling was employed to identify the NETs of varying ages, gender and races who worked in either a local primary or secondary school. Each identified NET would receive an email from the researcher to reaffirm their interest and to cross check if he/she met the selection criterion. The researcher contacted each of the interested NETs by phone to brief them clearly of the objective and procedure of the research. Sufficient time was spent with each informant on elaborating on the nature of the study in detail and explaining in great depth the confidentiality and anonymity of the research. At the end, the researcher was sure that none of the NETs expressed any more doubts or concerns about their participation and all nine NETs were asked to sign the research consent form at the interview (See Appendix A).

There is no limit on the sample size in qualitative methodology. The key to sample size is not how many cases are examined, but how much information-rich data are gathered in each case (Strauss and Corbin, 1989; Jones, 2002). It is important to determine when the point of redundancy is reached and saturation has occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Creswell, 1998): a simple set of rules to identify theoretical saturation are: nothing is added to the theory by the data, i.e. that the theory includes all the data, categories have well-developed properties and dimensions, and relationships among categories are established (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002).

In order to obtain an information-rich sample, nine participants were selected who met the criteria listed earlier. This specific group was selected due to its variety in terms of marital status, years of overseas experiences, age, gender, types of schools serving, years of serving in Hong Kong, and nationality. The details of the sample are presented in the following chapters, presented in such a way as to render it impossible for individuals to be identified (the issue of anonymity, discussed below).

### **3.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

In qualitative research there are different kinds and interpretations of validity and reliability from those in positivist research. The nature of qualitative research is interpretive. In terms of reliability and validity, qualitative research emphasizes the

trustworthiness of data, which refers, in part, to a “conceptual soundness” from which the research value can be ascertained and judged (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also opined that qualitative research should focus on achieving trustworthiness of data rather than adhering to positivist concepts of reliability and validity of research data and findings. According to them, trustworthiness in qualitative research consists of: credibility; dependability; and confirmability. Comparing positivistic paradigm and naturalistic approach, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that in interpretive models credibility is an analog to the internal validity of the conventional methods.

Applicability substituted external validity as it represents the extent to which the design and the data of a study are applicable across groups wherever they may happen to apply. Dependability therefore replaced positivist definitions of reliability as consistency and replicability. Lincoln and Guba also proposed that the conventional concept of objectivity be described as confirmability. As they suggested, “the four terms, ‘credibility’, ‘transferability’, ‘dependability’ and ‘confirmability’ are then the naturalist’s equivalents for the conventional terms ‘internal validity’, ‘external validity’, ‘reliability’ and ‘objectivity’” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

### **3.5.1 Validity**

In terms of validity, construct validity was demonstrated by ensuring that the key constructs of cross-cultural adjustment were rooted in the literature (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 138), such that the key issues in cross-cultural adjustment agreed with generally accepted constructs of what those key issues were and what they comprised. Content validity was addressed by ensuring that the key issues were covered in depth and breadth (*ibid.*: 137), and the use of probes served this purpose, together with ensuring that the items themselves were all explored and commented on by the participants. Though this research used a single instrument approach, thereby being unable to serve concurrent validity in terms of triangulation of instruments (*ibid.*: 141), nevertheless, as indicated above (Table 3.1), several questions were asked about each issue, and the same questions served several different issues.



In terms of cultural validity, Cohen *et al.* (2007: 139) suggest that ‘this is particularly an issue in cross-cultural, intercultural and comparative kinds of research, where the intention is to shape research so that it is appropriate to the culture of the researched. . . . cultural validity entails an appreciation of the cultural values of those being researched’. The research here deliberately and solely focused on the cultural values of the participants, and how they reacted to the cultural values of the new situation into which they had entered as sojourners, i.e. cultural validity was at the heart of the research.

### **3.5.2 Reliability**

Reliability in qualitative research concerns the dependability of the data, their accuracy, credibility, authenticity, honesty and candour, richness, fidelity to real life, comprehensiveness, detail, depth of response, and meaningfulness to the respondents (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 149). Here the interviews specifically focused on the real-life experiences of the participants, discussed them in the participants’ own terms and from their own examples, and used respondent validation to check that the understanding of, and interpretation placed on, them by the researcher was correct. Further, by touching on sensitive, deeply felt topics (e.g. cross-cultural adjustment, hostile schools, limited induction, differences of power, pedagogical culture shock), the issues of authenticity and depth of response were addressed. The use of probes and requests for examples sought the detail of ‘thick description’ that would give reliability to the data.

By conducting the interviews away from school, in a neutral venue and with guarantees given of anonymity and non-traceability (discussed below), it was intended that any feelings of threat or danger (e.g. if the school principal were to find out) would be reduced, so that the participants could speak freely, honestly and in depth. Further, the researcher deliberately tried to minimize any of her own personal biases and values from entering into the interviews (the issue of reflexivity, discussed earlier), so that the participants’ true feeling and views would be gathered.

The permission of each participant was obtained for the interview to be tape-recorded and transcribed after the interview. The recorded tapes and transcribed readings provided records of the exact words of the informants at the interviews. Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, each of the typed interviews was sent to the participants to

verify (respondent validation) (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 149). Data analyses were conducted on the verified interview scripts; to enhance the validation of the data analyses, preliminary findings of emerging codes were also sent to participants for comment once for further refinement. The involvement of the interviewees allowed the researcher to construct a more accurate portrayal of their experiences. This technique of member checking increased the trustworthiness of the data. Based on their feedback and suggestions, revisions to the analysis were made pertinently before a final version was produced. Morse *et al.* (2002) recommended that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies.

This research attempted to undertake several techniques cautiously to establish the trustworthiness of the data and results. Firstly, credibility was affirmed by testing whether the data reflected the multiple facets of the topic of the research accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) (akin to content validity). Through the extensive time and discussion with the participants and the data, the researcher established credibility for this study by involving participants to conduct member check for the emerging themes and data (Creswell, 1998). The opinions of participants were asked after the phases of data collection and analysis in order to avoid the seeping of participants' biases. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that members check gave credibility and validity of findings. Patton (2002) affirmed that audience review functions as a form of triangulation. 'Member checks' were employed in this study to validate the data and the theoretical scheme.

Transferability could be defined as a theoretical parameter of the research and the ability to apply the research findings in another setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In this study, the researcher attempted to provide very detailed and thorough descriptions of the research nature, purpose, methodology, the participants, the results, findings and the proposed emerging theory. Future researchers could conduct another research of similar objectives in other settings based on the information provided in this study. In this way, transferability was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In qualitative research, dependability can be achieved by ensuring that the data accurately represent and describe the varying conditions of the phenomena under study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the researcher obtained permission of the participants to record

the interviews and have the contents transcribed immediately after each interview. The information, together with the subsequent analyses, was sent to the participants for checking and correction. Moreover, to ensure an accurate description and interpretation of the data, the researcher also jotted field notes about the interview duration, atmosphere, informant's attitude, researcher's reflection etc. for each interview as soon as possible before data analyses were conducted. In this way, the researcher was able to confirm the correctness and accuracy of the data collected for the study.

### **3.6 ETHICAL ISSUES**

The major ethical issues for this study were to protect the privacy, anonymity and non-traceability of the participants (Cohen *et al.*: 63-6), so that no harm could come to them (the issue of 'non-maleficence') (*ibid.*: 58-60), indeed so that benefit could be brought to NETs in Hong Kong by having the study contribute to improving their situation (the issue of beneficence (*ibid.*: 58-60)). The native-speaking English teachers participating in the study chose not to be identified as they did not wish their sharing to bring about any negative impact on their relationships with colleagues or on their career. Neither did these teachers want to see their personal challenges and experiences being spread widely among their colleagues and the public. To encourage the NETs to offer a free and honest sharing of their experiences in the work and daily environment, the researcher used pseudonyms for each one of them in the report and aggregated the data on the characteristics of the participants such that none of them could be identified or traced (see chapter four).

Participants were fully informed of the purposes, audiences and contents of the research, they had every right either not to accept the invitation to participate (i.e. they were volunteers) or to withdraw or not answer particular questions if they wished (the issue of 'informed consent' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 52-5)). Indeed the research was approved by the university's Ethics Advisory Committee. Prior to all interviews, participants were asked to sign an 'informed consent' form, which had been approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee (see Appendix A). All the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, in private and at a location chosen by the respondents.

Some native-speaking English teachers seemed to be quite cautious about talking too much about their situation, the challenges at work or their supervisors in their work lives. This might be due to their concern that the sharing might offend the school supervisors or the government. To encourage them to talk freely without worries, I repeatedly guaranteed to the NETs that their identities would not be exposed as pseudonyms would be used in the report.

Whilst Cohen *et al.* (2007: 46-8) indicate a possible overlap between ethics and politics (e.g. if a researcher researches his or her own organization, or if a participant discloses information that may bring herself/himself into danger or difficulty), the politics of the research was not seen to be an issue here. This was because the researcher was researching outside her own workplace institution, was interviewing participants anonymously and non-traceably, and was interviewing them away from their workplace.

### **3.7 BOUNDARIES OF THE STUDY**

As in every qualitative or quantitative research, the study has strengths and limitations. Firstly, it should be recognized that the findings may not be easily generalizable to the greater population of native-speaking English teachers in the local schools in Hong Kong. Due to the fact that only those NETs who were staying in Hong Kong and who were willing to participate in the research could be accessed, excluded in this research were those who planned to resign or leave Hong Kong after their contracts expired, those who were still staying in Hong Kong but who had switched to other professions, or those who have already left Hong Kong before or after their contracts expired, for sundry reasons. There was no guarantee that these participants would have had experiences similar to those who were interviewed.

Secondly, due to the limitations of time available for completion of the study, and for budgetary reasons, the scale and scope of the research was constrained to some extent. For example, family members of the NETs, colleagues, supervisors, Hong Kong teachers, policy makers or decision makers could not be interviewed to provide a more balanced view. This was not seen to be a problem here, as the intention was to see the situation through the eyes of the sojourners, and the sojourners alone. The data were perception-

based, but this was seen as a strength rather than as a problem, as it accorded with principles of interactionism set out at the start of the chapter. Also those who had left the profession or Hong Kong could not be tracked.

Thirdly, interpretations of research findings in qualitative research may vary greatly due to factors like background and experiences of the researcher. Although this researcher had limited experience in conducting qualitative methods for her past research projects, the qualitative approach was adopted mainly due to the nature of the research problem that was presented in the dissertation. To overcome this limitation, this researcher attempted to cover the inadequacies by consistently seeking advice of experienced scholars in the university where she is working regarding qualitative methodologies throughout the process she devised and conducted this study. The researcher has also read widely about the qualitative methodologies. Important works of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Denzin (1978), Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003) were inspiring and helpful to guide her study. Despite the limitations associated with the background and experiences of this researcher, the selected methodology, employing grounded theory, was based on the precepts devised by its original authors and latter contributors as far as possible.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study would still serve as a useful reference for the government and the local schools. With a better understanding of the experiences of the NETs and their responses to the changes in a culturally different environment, hopefully the Education Bureau of the HKSAR government and the local schools will be able to understand the needs of the NETs from a broader perspective and thus begin to consider providing pertinent support, create more favourable environments, promote practices and policies that may facilitate the NETs in adjusting more smoothly to their work and life in the culturally different environment and function more effectively in their profession, such that eventually the overall cost-effectiveness of the NET scheme can be enhanced for the benefits of the students and schools as a whole.

With these boundaries set, and the research design complete, the thesis moves to the data discussion in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The chapter analyzes the data and summarizes the findings. This research aims at learning the NETs' cross-cultural adjustment experiences in Hong Kong and how they responded in the face of the changes in a new cultural environment. After completing individual interviews with nine native-speaking English teachers (NETs), one core category and four key categories emerged from the sharing of these teachers. Following a review of the profiles of the nine participants, discussion is provided of the four key categories that emerged using the tools of grounded theory and qualitative data analysis – coding, axial coding, constant comparison, theoretical saturation, core categories, content analysis – and the relevance of the findings related to the literature. A comprehensive view emerged of the cross-cultural experiences of the NETs in Hong Kong and the ways they coped with a different culture, and this lends itself well to the testing of the hypothesis set out in the opening of the thesis, that cross-cultural adjustment was a significant feature of the experiences of the NETs in Hong Kong, and could contribute to the retention and attrition rates reported in chapter one.

#### **4.1 THE TOOLS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

Several tools of qualitative data analysis were used (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Brown *et al.*, 2002), including: coding; axial coding; constant comparison; theoretical saturation; core categories; content analysis; pattern coding; memoing and reflections. With regard to the issue of 'reflections', the researcher not only included personal reflections but reflections from the point of view of the literature. Hence this chapter combines data analysis with interpretation and discussion, and this reflects not only the interpretive 'double hermeneutic' referred to in chapter 3, but it also reflects Geertz's (1973) comment on the impossibility of separating data from interpretation. Geertz (1973) opined that anthropological writings are interpretations, and are therefore tantamount to fictions that are created by the authors.

Further, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 207-8) write that:

When it comes to writing up, the principle of reflexivity implies a number of things. The construction of the researcher's account is, in principle, no different from other varieties of account: just as there is no neutral language of description, so there is no neutral mode of report. The reflexive researcher, then, must remain self-conscious as an author, and the chosen modes of writing should not be taken for granted. There can be no question, then, of viewing writing as a purely technical matter . . . [it] is more informal and impressionistic and thus written in the first person.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983.: 207-8)

Hence reflection, interpretation and reference to the literature are made in this data analysis.

Whilst some of the *tools* of grounded theory were used, grounded theory *per se* was not used, as the hypothesis had already been established at the start of the thesis (that cross-cultural adjustment in NETs affects attrition rates). In 'pure' grounded theory, the theory emerges from the data; in the thesis here this was not the case, the theory/explanation/thesis having already been set out at the start of the research, and the qualitative data being used to test the theory (that cross-cultural adjustment affects attrition rates). That said, several features – or tools – of the process of grounded theory were used for analyzing, organizing, and reporting the data.

In grounded theory, coding is carried out in order to identify categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Brown *et al.*, 2002). All interviews were digitally recorded, uploaded to a computer and transcribed verbatim. To ensure the data accurately recorded the conversations at the interviews, I sent the transcripts back to each participant for reading and verifying before conducting the data analyses. Then I carefully read through each transcript several times until I became familiarized with the contents. When trying to do the open coding, I underlined the words, phrases, or sentences that appeared frequently, carried significant meanings or summarized actions or events. I also tried to put down some preliminary codes besides these identifiable units.

After the first reading of the transcripts, a preliminary list of concepts was generated. Themes that emerged during the interviews were coded. These initial concepts were further studied and revisions were made as appropriate to refine these themes, while additional themes might also be identified.

At times different themes emerged from the same set of data, hence the same data would therefore be drawn on in different sections. For example, under the ‘culture shock’ section, I cited Daniel’s puzzled observation that the locals stared at him a lot and refused to sit next to him, which he perceived as a sign of racial discrimination resulting from his physical difference; this was a theme supported by many other NETs; however, his response towards the locals’ attitudes indicated that a positive attitude can turn things around to facilitate instead of hampering adjustment in the new environment, which was another theme grouped under the section of ‘factors that influence the process of adjustment’.

The codes would be refined whenever new data were identified and compared against existing data and categories. Then I re-examined these words and phrases again and again in order to find out the links between them. I attempted to explore their interrelationships by comparing and contrasting the identifiable units. To facilitate my doing so, I have listed out these identifiable units for each transcript on a separate table in order to show the codes and categories clearly. Comparison and contrast were conducted within and across the transcripts. Refinement of codes and categories continued. As the process went on, the properties and dimensions became more and more established. Samples of the interview transcripts and coding can be found in Appendix C in Appendix D respectively.

In-depth analysis was carried out until no new information occurred and categories showed theoretical saturation as stated in the process of theoretical sampling (i.e. where all of the data are accounted for, included and where no additions to the theory are made by the data).

In using tools from grounded theory as a way of analyzing and organizing the data analysis, several steps were followed:



- Step One: Decide the codes to be used in the analysis;
- Step Two: Construct the categories for analysis;
- Step Three: Conduct the coding and categorizing of the data;
- Step Four: Conduct the data analysis;
- Step Five: Summarize.

#### 4.1.1 Coding

Cohen *et al.* (2007: 492-3) indicate that coding:

is the process of disassembling and reassembling the data. Data are disassembled when they are broken apart into lines, paragraphs or sections. These fragments are then rearranged, through coding, to produce a new understanding that explores similarities, differences, across a number of different cases. . . . there are three types of coding: open, axial and selective coding, the intention of which is to deconstruct the data into manageable chunks in order to facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon in question. *Open coding* involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions, events and so on. . . . *Axial coding* seeks to make links between categories and codes, to integrate codes around the axes of central categories; the essence of axial coding is the interconnectedness of categories. Hence codes are explored [and] their interrelationships are examined. . . . In *selective coding* a core code is identified and the relationship between that core code and other codes is made clear.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 492-3)

The different kinds of coding alluded to in this quotation were used in the data analysis here.

#### 4.1.2 Constant comparison

Cohen *et al.* (*ibid.*: 493) write that

In constant comparison the researcher compares the new data with existing data and categories, so that the categories achieve a perfect fit with the data. If there is a poor fit between data and categories, or indeed between theory and data, then the categories and theories have to be modified until all the data are accounted for. In constant comparison, discrepant, negative and disconfirming cases are important in rendering the . . . theory [to] fit all the data. Constant comparison is the process 'by which the properties and categories across the data are compared continuously until no more variation occurs', i.e. saturation is reached.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 493)

Constant comparison was undertaken with the data analysis in this thesis.

#### 4.1.3 *Core variables and saturation*

Cohen *et al.* (2007: 494) write that:

Through the use of constant comparison a core variable is identified: that variable which accounts for most of the data and to which as much as possible is related, that variable around which the most data are focused. Saturation is reached when no new insights, codes or categories are produced even when new data are added, and when all of the data are accounted for in the core categories and sub-categories.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 494)

The identification of a core variable was achieved in the data analysis in this thesis, through constant comparison and the finding of a recurrent criterion against which other important factors were referred.

#### 4.1.4 *Theoretical sampling*

Of theoretical sampling, Cohen *et al.* (2007: 492) write:

In theoretical sampling, data collection continues until sufficient data have been gathered to create an . . . explanation of what is happening and its key features. . . . The basic criterion governing the selection of comparison groups for discovering theory is their *theoretical relevance* for furthering the development of emerging categories rather than, for example, conventional sampling strategies.

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 492)

Theoretical sampling was undertaken in this data analysis, combined with saturation, coding and constant comparison, in order to identify key factors and issues in the field of cross-cultural adjustment, so that the hypothesis set out in chapter one could be tested.

In ensuring that the data analysis was true to the data not only was there respondent validation but the researcher addressed several criteria for effective qualitative data analysis set out by Glaser and Strauss (1967, cited in Cohen *et al.* (2007: 494-5), including: ‘the closeness of the *fit* between the theory and the data’ (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 494) and the comprehensive coverage of the data. Cohen *et al.* (*ibid.*: 495) cite Strauss and Corbin (1990: 253-6) who suggest several criteria for evaluating qualitative data analysis:

- How adequately and powerfully the [analysis] accounts for the main concerns of the data;
- The closeness of the fit of the theory to the data and phenomenon being studied. . . ;
- The fit of the axial coding to the categories and codes;
- . . . . What major categories emerged?
- What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on (as indicators) that pointed to some of the major categories?
- . . . . How and why was the core category selected (sudden, gradual, difficult, easy)? On what grounds?
- Are concepts generated and systematically related?

- Are there many conceptual linkages, and are the categories well developed?

(Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 495)

In the data analysis here these criteria were addressed by using the tools of content analysis, coding, saturation and constant comparison in order to identify key themes and factors concerning cross-cultural adjustment

Using these tools for data analysis the chapter proceeds firstly to indicate the characteristics of the sample, and then to move to the data themselves.

## **4.2 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES**

The sample comprised nine native-speaking English teachers. The ethical guarantees of confidentiality and non-traceability of participants prevent the presentation of detailed demographic data that would enable individuals to be identified, and also, in some cases, details of the location of the interviews. Indeed pseudonyms are used throughout. However, taken together, the participants had the following characteristics:

1. Six males and three females.
2. Ages ranged from 20+ to 50 +, with the largest group comprising those aged 30-50.
3. Six different nationalities were represented, the largest single group coming from Australia.
4. Six were single and three were married.
5. All had a first degree; three had a postgraduate certificate or diploma in education, four had a Master's degree.
6. Four could speak a language other than English.
7. None could speak Cantonese to any perceptible level.
8. They had lived in Hong Kong for a minimum of one year and a maximum of 9.5 years.
9. Six were teaching in primary schools, and three were teaching in secondary schools.

10. Six had attended the EMB 3-day induction workshop on cross-cultural training, two had attended some insubstantial cross-cultural training both inside and outside Hong Kong, and one had received no cross-cultural training at all.

It can be seen that a spectrum of factors was represented in the make-up of the participants, indicating that it was likely that there was coverage of key variables in the characteristics of the participants.

## **4.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

The data were coded, organized using axial codes, and, through constant comparison of the groupings, coding and data, reviewed to ensure that the data were all included and accounted for in the key categories (i.e. saturation), the core category emerged. The core category identified from the data was named '*responding to cultural changes with flexibility and achieving self- enhancement and transformation*'. The four key categories were:

- (a) Learning the alien culture: differences and similarities;
- (b) Adopting multi-flexible approaches in face of cultural differences;
- (c) Experiencing self enhancement and transformation; and
- (d) Factors that may affect the process and outcomes of cross-cultural contacts.

Each of these is discussed below. How the four key categories relate to each other and to the core category is presented in Figure 4.1. The model in Figure 4.1 adopts the suggestion of Miles and Huberman (1994) to try to indicate causal lines of direction, accepting that such a recursive model might over-simplify the multiple lines of causal influence or direction. The Figure 4.1, then, suggests the main direction of influence rather than all of the directions.

### **4.3.2 Learning the Alien Culture: differences and similarities**

The first key category that contributed to the core category was learning the alien culture. This category is chronologically the first in the sequence as each of the participants would immediately experience the differences or similarities in various aspects of their life and work in the new environment at the very moment they set foot on the foreign soil. They noticed the differences in many aspects, including their own and others' different physical appearance and codes of behaviour, and the new environment. The NETs were aware of the conspicuous cultural differences, but some did observe similarities in aspects like language and general kindness in human nature. The NETs considered the differences or similarities to range from being small to substantial; indeed the vectors of the several coded components of this key category are presented in Table 4.1.

Figure 4.1 : A Model of Native-Speaking English Teachers responding to cultural changes with flexibility and achieving self enhancement and transformation.

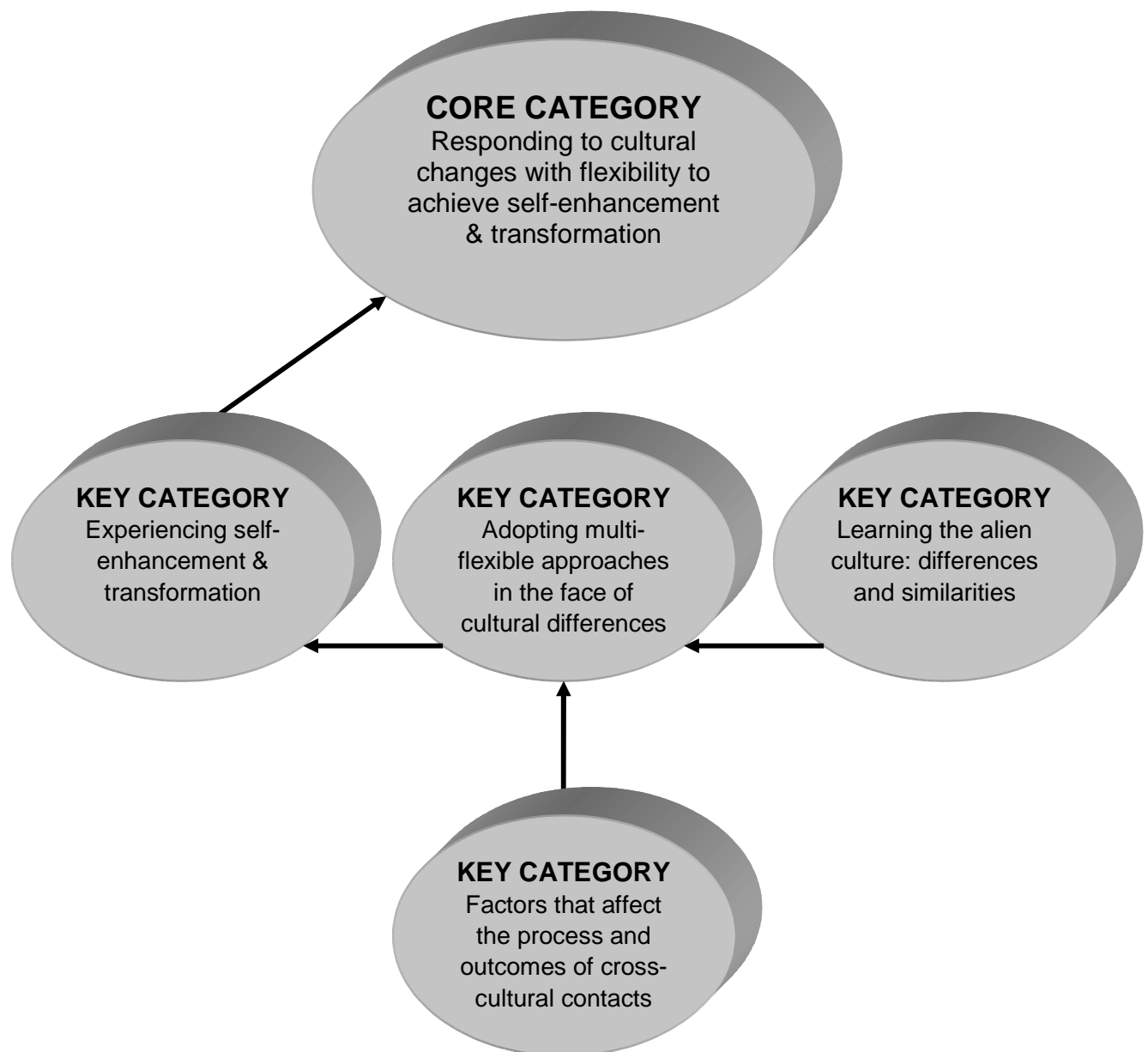


Table 4.1: Codes and categories for ‘learning the alien culture’: differences and similarities’

LEARNING THE ALIEN CULTURE		
Properties	Components	Dimensions
<b>Work</b>	<i>Culture</i> <i>Return</i>	From exotic to familiar From intrinsic to extrinsic
<b>Daily life</b>	<i>Liveliness &amp; variety</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- many cultural entertainments</li> <li>- great variety of food</li> <li>- many social avenues for westerners</li> <li>- always new developments</li> </ul> <i>Convenience &amp; freedom</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- compact neighbourhood</li> <li>- good transport system</li> <li>- easy and freedom to travel around Asia and the world</li> <li>- can survive with English only</li> <li>- too much bureaucracy when applying for daily things</li> </ul> <i>Cost of living</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- expensive rents</li> <li>- other things cheap</li> </ul> <i>International</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- bilingual</li> <li>- East meets West</li> </ul>	From disliking to finding it exciting
<b>People</b>	<i>Host nationals</i> <i>Non-local friends</i>	From friendly to discriminating From cosmetic to honest
<b>Environment</b>	<i>Weather</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hot humid summer</li> <li>- mild winter</li> </ul> <i>Law and Order</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- safe</li> <li>- clean</li> </ul> <i>Pollution</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- air</li> <li>- noise</li> </ul> <i>Novelty</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building style</li> <li>- smell</li> <li>- contrasts among districts</li> </ul>	From few to many From appreciating the variety & novelty of the environment to finding it spoiled and polluted
<b>HK Education</b>	<i>Students</i> <i>Ethos of teaching</i> <i>NET Scheme</i>	Lovable to unruly Being different to complete antithesis of the west Unimpressive to professional



Table 4.1 indicates that the differences/similarities related not just to what they observed in the new context but also related to how they saw themselves in relation to the new context. Sojourners in a new cultural environment often instantly realize that they awkwardly stand out from the majority culture as they look, sound, and act differently from the natives in the new environment (Van Manen, 1990). In this study, the NETs realized that the locals treated them negatively or positively due to their different physical appearances.

Firstly, many NETs found that they looked differently and were always stared at by the locals. These made them feel uneasy or scared.

“Hong Kong people like staring. They not only stare at me, but my whole family. That makes us feel uneasy” (George)

“At first I was really shy. They stared at me a lot when I walked on the street.”  
(Nancy)

Studies have found (Paige, 1983) that being highly visible would produce stress for the NETs. Many informants reported that they felt uneasy by the stare of the locals. Previous research indicated that nonverbal behaviours such as stares and the level of gazing (Burgoon, 1995) could carry evaluations that ranged from extremely positive to extremely negative. For example, high-gaze persons sent out messages of being disrespectful, threatening and insulting (Burgoon *et al.*, 1989). The NETs perceived these markers carried negative meanings and set them apart as strangers.

Moreover, they found that the locals refused to stay close to them.

“when I sit down on the MTR or the bus, people don’t want to sit next to me. You see in their faces, here is the gweilo.” (Daniel)

“I’ve been sitting on the MTR, it was a packed train, people everywhere, there would be an empty seat next to me, but no one would sit in it. Maybe I was a gweilo.” (Machi)

Both Daniel and Machi were puzzled why the locals refused to sit next to them, the only reason they could think of was their different physical appearance. Like every white foreigner, they have learnt the derogatory term “gweilo”, used by the locals to describe the white face foreigners. They described these experiences among “a few negative things” and “the things I disliked about HK”. They believed these incidents were “a racist issue”.

NETs, some of whom had white or black skin colours, realized that they would be treated differently because of their different skin colours. Firstly, white expatriates would find themselves cheated by the locals, as in the cases of Nancy and Donna. “Maybe because I’m westerner, they cheat me a lot”. Nancy was cheated by the locals because she found out from her colleagues that the boutiques or barber shops would charge her much higher fees than the locals, taking advantage of the fact that she could not read the prices. Likewise, Trudy found herself cheated by the hotel staff when she first arrived. She lost her wallet and passport and she believed they were stolen by the hotel staff because she realized that she couldn’t open the door of her room and “it was double locked from outside”. But the hotel staff claimed that she had opened the door with the wrong key, “so it was like I had made a mistake”. She called the police and the lost items were recovered.

On the other hand, those with darker complexions would find themselves treated rudely by the locals. Donna is a Trinidadian with a Chinese father. She is not a typical white westerner and experienced very different treatment by the locals.

“In the beginning, a lot of the time most people thought that I was a Philippino maid. ... when I go out with my NET friends, they’re all white. . . . they always got treated much better than I do because how they look. . . . it makes me realize that we are all foreigners, we got treated very differently”. (Donna)

My interview field notes captured the interesting incident in more detail:

1 December 2008: Donna was surprised that she would be regarded and treated as a Philippina when she dressed casually. She learnt that because Philippinas were maids, the locals looked down upon them, and they treated her rudely accordingly. Once she was yelled at by a shop attendant at a shopping mall when she tried to ask for the price. By

contrast, she realized that the locals treated her white NET friends with much more respect, they would make way for her white friends to pass on the street; however, people would stand in her way without moving, as if she were transparent. She also realized that her white friends would be cheated by the locals as they would be charged higher fees for purchasing commodities. The locals tended to think the white foreigners richer and tried to take advantage of their ignorance of Chinese.

*Reflections:* Donna did feel surprised and upset when people treated her without respect because of her dark complexion, especially when she noticed that they treated her white friends with so much more respect. However, she believed she has learnt “both sides of the HK people because of how I look” through the experiences. She was able to perceive the pros and cons of being a non-white/dark-skinned expatriate in Hong Kong, but she did not remain upset for long. She considered this to be “a very humbling experience” as she understood and sympathized with the dark foreigners who were usually of lower socio-economic status and hence would be treated rudely by the Hong Kong people. Donna’s experience reflected the varied attitudes of Hong Kong people towards different groups of expatriates and the possible responses of an expatriate.

(Location: a cafe near to Donna’s place of residence; Time: 8:00pm; Duration: 2 hours).

The statements showed perceived prejudice concerns about socio-economic status in addition to racial difference. The experiences described above revealed that the skin colours and appearance of the expatriates evoked a sense of inferiority or superiority in the NETs, a phenomenon which is related to ‘ethnic prestige’, resulting from the “overall standing attributed to that group relative to other groups in society” (Kim, 2001). The NETs felt that the host members related their skin colours and physical appearances to their socio-economic status and would hence regard them higher or lower accordingly.

The experiences also showed that both groups were perceived to have remarkable racial and cultural dissimilarities. The prejudice experience lends support to Tajfel’s (1981) suggestion that intergroup differentiation existed because individuals in the groups felt they need to give social meaning to social identity to the intergroup situation through the creation of intergroup differences. In fact, both groups noticed many markers of

differentiation related to aspects of physical appearances, skin colour and behaviour as mentioned above. A rich body of literature supports the view that social contact between culturally disparate individuals is difficult and stressful, which can be explained by various theoretical principles. The major principle is the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1969). It predicts that people prefer to work or play with people sharing salient characteristics with them. This implies that people of different cultures will not naturally enjoy the company of one another due to the dissimilarities in aspects like physical appearance.

Moreover, according to the process of social categorization (Abrams and Hogg, 1990), people categorized as in-group members are usually treated with preference while out-group members are not. The process of stereotyping (Kvale, 1996; Lobel, 1990) will attribute certain traits to individuals that categorize the group the people belong to. These explain why the locals refuse to sit next to the white face “gweilos” or cheated them or stared at them always.

Van Manen (1990) presented the concept of lived space as an important and meaning-laden human condition which provides the context that affects how we feel. Studies suggested that change of physical environments in and of itself produces much of the stress that may be attributed to culture (Barna, 1983; Lobel, 1990; Weaver, 1993) due to the loss of familiar environmental cues. The findings of this study produced mixed results as discussed below.

All the informants mentioned the differences in the physical environment in aspects like living spaces, food and weather. They appreciated some aspects while abhorring the others.

As it was winter time when the interviews were conducted, the informants all appeared to be quite comfortable with the weather.

“Winter is fine here.” (Johnny)

“I like the mild weather here.” (Jacky)

Moreover, compared with the western countries, all of the NETs found Hong Kong a very safe city.

“I think lots of the negative things of the west, we are refreshing to get rid of. I am pleased with the safety here” (Daniel)

“But one thing good about HK is the safety.” (George)

Many NETs considered their home countries unsafe. George explained that in New Zealand, “everyone lives in houses, burglars can break into easily.” Donna described her home town in Trinidad as “a city with an incredulous crime rate.” To them, Hong Kong is a very safe city as there is a “respect for property, respect for other people.” They did not need to “worry about someone breaking into your apartments.” They were pleased to get rid of the “more negative aspects of Australian and western societies” such as “graffiti, violence, drink driving.” To them, it is “very safe and pleasing to my family”. Although Trudy was robbed twice in Hong Kong, each time she was able to recover her properties with the help of the police. She was able to say that, “Yea even this happened, I think HK is still safe.”

Hong Kong is not only safe but clean in the eyes of some NETs.

“Hong Kong is not that strange, the only thing that’s strange is the hygiene. All the HK people are very crazy about hygiene. The only country in the world which is crazy about hygiene.” (Jacky)

Like some other NETs, Jacky observed that Hong Kong people had some “peculiar habits”. They would “use different chopsticks to pick up the food, even in Japan, they don’t do that”. When he picked up the food from the table, “you think that’s strange, you think it’s dirty.” These kinds of reactions of the locals looked funny to those NETs who had observed the difference.

They were also fascinated by the novelty of the new environment, they found it interesting to explore and experience the differences.

“Involve yourself, go to all the different places.” (Daniel)

“Make the most of the differences, I wouldn’t have that back home.” (Machi)

“You’ve got all the places to visit in Hong Kong.” (Donna)

They noticed differences in many aspects. They enjoyed the great varieties in the eating outlets, “we go to different bars, all the different restaurants”. There were different sorts of places to visit such as the markets, the peak, the nature, the city centre, and they were pleased that they “can do whatever you want”. They found great contrasts among the districts “fascinating” and “very exotic”. “You have the East meets West. If you go to Langkwaifong“蘭桂芳”, it’s so western . . . . you almost forget for a minute that you are in Hong Kong. And then you come here to Tsuen Kwan O, you got the whole contrast”. Several of them have even differentiated the smells in different places, “Different places have different smells, like Mongkok. There are some very strong smells in different places, very smelly places”. Instead of feeling stressful, the NETs were enchanted by these differences and novelty, “amazing. . . . I love that in Hong Kong.” and “it makes me feel like I’m living in another country, I want that experience.”

However, some aspects of the environment like the blistering summer heat and high humidity did bother them; they also abhorred the fact that the environment was deteriorating fast through pollution.

“Weather in summer is being a problem for me, it’s terrible, humidity, . . . . if you’re outside for two minutes, you’re dripping, there’s nothing you can do.” (Johnny)

“I don’t like the humidity. I don’t like summer here. Ah actually that’s very difficult for me” (Nancy)

The scorching summer did pose difficulties to them physically and psychologically as some reported worries and sickness. Culture shock research observed a link between life changes and psychological and psychosomatic distress for immigrants to new cultural environment (Masuda *et al.*, 1982; Befus, 1988). As Nancy said, “It really affects my health. . . . Every three weeks, I’ll get a fever for about 2 or 3 days.”

Another environmental aspect that bothered the NETs was the worsening pollution problem they had witnessed during their stay in Hong Kong.

“No one cares about environment.” (Daniel)

“The pollution is more of the problem, really I think, in the four years I’ve been here, it’s got so much worse, it’s got so much worse.” (Johnny)

“The pollution is a definite, serious problem.” (Trudy)

“The most challenging things for many westerners in HK is the constant chronic noise from the crowd.” (Raymond)

“Oh, yea, the people, the crowd, I’m sick of the crowd, amazing number of people out there.” (Daniel)

They realized the pollution has become so bad that “if you have a clear day now, it’s quite unusual”. The problem so afflicted the NETs and their non-local friends that “many friends of mine have left because of this”. The noise from the crowds was so disturbing that they “would try every way to avoid the crowds during the holidays.”

I did not expect to hear the NETs complain about the worsening pollution repeatedly in the interviews. Initially I felt strange that Daniel repeatedly suggested that we conducted the interview at his home. For safety’s sake, I suggested to meet with this “stranger” at a café instead. After listening to his sharing, I came to understand that his concern was about the crowds and the noise pollution on the streets.

However, it is also interesting to learn that some NETs were able to perceive something positive out of the worsening pollution. Johnny has been driven crazy by the crowds, but he appreciated that many good things happen because of the crowds also. He took the view that there was a good side in everything if one could stay positive.

“of course the problem is that there’re always people, the crowd is there. You can’t get away from people, on a Sunday, it’s just crazy busy, I can’t stand it on Sunday in Mongkok or Causeway Bay. The crowds are the problem, but because of the crowds, you have all the good things as well.” (Johnny)

Donna had become more environmentally friendly as she felt it necessary to help keep the environment clean in Hong Kong.

“I’ve become much greener, to be more eco-friendly. . . . I put all my bags in the recycle bins, because you’re killing Hong Kong. You know, so it’s important to be very eco-friendly, recycle and reuse.”

In addition to the physical environment, NETs also noticed lots of differences in the social environment. They found it convenient and cheap to live in Hong Kong, and they also found the city very international and full of vitality. They found their lives in Hong Kong fascinating to exhausting.

Many NETs described Hong Kong as “efficient” and “convenient”. The efficient and convenient transport system impressed them the most.

“The local transport is so convenient and so good.” (George)

“Transport is very very good.” (Daniel)

“Anything I particular like is how good your transport system is, the MTR, and the octopus, . . . it’s perfect.” (Jacky)

“HK is much more convenient, . . .the transport is really good, it’s cheap. . . . it’s so convenient in HK.” (Johnny)

Convenience and freedom mainly come from the efficient transport system which they described as “perfect”, “fantastic”, “brilliant”. They found it amazing that the “shops are always open in HK”, they liked “the idea of compact neighbourhood”, where they can “get everything within a five minute walk.” The efficient transport also made it “great for socializing.”

In addition to convenience, NETs also enjoyed a sense of freedom as they could travel to different places easily from Hong Kong on low budgets also.

“Coming over here we’ve done traveling, . . . that’s another advantage, it’s opened our eyes to some other opportunities.” (Daniel)



“I love the feeling of movement that I get in HK, in Japan, I felt I was trapped in the place where I was, whereas here, I feel, a great degree of freedom. . . . Realizing that I am not trapped here and stuck here . . .increase the feeling of being comfortable here . . . .don’t have any sense of isolation.” (Machi)

The point made by Machi prompted further investigation.

12 January 2008: Machi looked very irritated initially while sharing about his bad experiences when he first arrived. He suddenly brightened up and looked lively when he shared his views about the moment he realized he’s got so much freedom here. He was very happy because the freedom enabled him to get connected with other parts of the world so that he would not feel trapped and isolated. He was comparing his experiences in Hong Kong and Japan.

*Reflections:* NETs repeatedly compared Hong Kong more favourably with Japan. It was evident that NETs enjoyed the convenience and freedom of being able to travel to many more different places quicker and cheaper from Hong Kong. It indicates that each Asian country has its distinctive culture despite the geographical proximity. Hence NETs’ experiences in different Asian destinations may vary widely.

(Location: a cafe in Wan Chai where Machi would attend a workshop organized by the Education Bureau afterwards; Time: 2:15pm; Duration: 1 hour)

Another thing that the NETs appreciated a lot was that living in Hong Kong was cheap especially when their salaries were high. They described things as “cheap”, “very cheap” and “attractive”. They cited many examples to illustrate the situation.

“Something is a lot better than UK, I think things generally are a lot cheaper.” (Johnny)

“The low salary tax is definitely attractive.” (Raymond)

“The way of relaxing in HK is to go out and meet your friends, go shopping and go to restaurants, bars, it’s cheap.” (Donna)

“I like the sort of entertainment here, you have good theatres and the sports, like in Tuen Mun, you have very cheap movie theatres, 30 dollars only.” (Jacky)

Again there were frequent comparisons of Hong Kong with other countries. The overall impression was so good that even when the expensive rental fees that have bothered so many local people here appeared not to be a concern to them, they suggested the issue could be easily solved, “the rent is bit expensive, but you can live in a smaller older flat.” Although to the locals, it was not ‘cheap’ to live in Hong Kong, to the westerners, living here is inexpensive and the cost of living low.

All the NETs found Hong Kong a very international city. It was particularly interesting as many NETs actually came from international western cities like London, Toronto, and Sydney.

“Hong Kong is amazing, it reminds me of many big international cities, London, New York, it’s got bright lights, fascinating. . . . It’s an international city. You have the East meets West.” (Donna)

“I think everything is different also because HK is such an international city, I know London is as well, but I think HK is more.” (Johnny)

“I’ve overused the word international. But I guess, yea, I would say, like compared to Japan, Korea or even mainland China, so HK has more of an international feel than some other places.” (Raymond)

To the NETs, international refers to a place where English can be easily understood in daily communication, in Hong Kong “almost everyone can speak some English”, “when you go into the bars, even the Chinese people speak English, and I think, wow, it’s like there’s no Chinese, everyone can speak English,” and where East meets West, “the other advantage of HK, being officially bilingual, if you have official business, you can cope and deal in English”. There were lots of comparisons of Hong Kong with other Asian and even western countries. Some NETs described Hong Kong as “a world city”, which matched wonderfully with the promotional slogan used by the Hong Kong government. To the NETs, this is a very positive factor that facilitates their adjustment in Hong Kong, “HK is relatively easier to adapt”.

No matter whether the NETs liked Hong Kong or not, they would not deny that Hong Kong was a place full of vitality and variety.

“I came to HK about 5 years ago. . . . I really like HK, the place, the energy, a great exciting city.” (Johnny)

“Oh, I love it, yea yea. . .because the lifestyle here is so exciting. . . .yea, I love it.” (Machi)

“There is a real buzz in the air.” (Donna)

They found Hong Kong exciting and energetic partly because “it’s an international place”, which enables them to have “access to all kinds of people and entertainments”, and it’s “easy to travel to anywhere”. They realized Hong Kong has something for everyone because of the wide selection of “food”, “entertainment”, “theatres and sports”, “all sorts of museums”, “nature reserves and city life” that suit the tastes and needs of different people. All of these make Hong Kong an “exciting”, “amazing” place to live in and the “experience is eye opening.”

Jackson (2006) mentioned that “context is where the experience is obtained for fulfillment of expectations.” Another facet of cultural difference is linked to the NETs’ work and daily life, the major contexts for their experiences. They realized differences in the codes of behaviour and values of the new environment and its educational practices. A defining characteristics of informants’ heightened self-awareness of being different in the new cultural environment was found in the domain of general behavior expectations and the unwritten rules of how to act so as not to appear different. These realizations made them uncomfortable, puzzled or upset. The lack of knowledge of how to act or behave in the new environment is the most common symptom of culture shock (Weaver, 1993). Zeitlin (1996) suggested that levels of culture shock might be predictable based on differences in cultural values.

Some NETs found the behavior of Hong Kong people shocking while some were able to accept the differences. Firstly, Hong Kong people could be rude and impolite. For example, they would cut the queue instead of lining up, they would push the people away to catch the public transport, they would not say thank-you in response to someone’s help.

“Ah...people cutting the queue, it’s the daily culture aspect that westerners find it really shocking.” (Raymond)

“In the rush hours, people can be very harsh, they would push you with their arms to get the seats first. So for me, I’ll ask why are you so impolite? We are all lining up, why can’t you wait?” (Trudy)

“How everyone races to the train! They get in front of the doors, ready to get on, as soon as the doors open, they’ll rush in, but you got to get out. They don’t wait, they won’t line up on the yellow lines. . . .Or if my daughter or I open the door for someone, they don’t say thank-you.” (George)

“I did find people a little bit, when you ask for direction, people’d be very negative, in Australia, people will say, oh oh, yes, they will smile and say goodbye. But people here, will say don’t bother me.”

They also found the Hong Kong people energetic but stressful.

“It’s a lot more relaxed back home, here it’s a lot more pressurized.” (Machi)

“People are stressed.” (Trudy)

“Always something going on, the people never sleep. . . .I admire the Hong Kong people for their diligence, but I just can’t do that.” (Donna)

They find that Hong Kong people “don’t relax”, always “busy, busy working”, hence they “don’t have much socializing and social life.” They realized that people became “tired”, “exhausted” always. A few have even witnessed the local teachers “go into tears because they just feel like they can’t do anymore.” After listening to so many sharing, the repetitive message is the same and the theme is clear. The following is an extract of my field notes of the interview with Donna:

1 December 2007: Donna sounded very compassionate. She realized how hard the Hong Kong people have to work. She noticed that some staff in the supermarket had to work at “graveyard shift” at midnight when one should be sleeping. She had a few colleagues who have broken down because they could not bear with the work pressure while they could

not quit their jobs. She admitted that she enjoyed the convenience brought by their hard work, but she found the stressful lifestyle “abhorring”.

*Reflections:* Hong Kong people usually worked strenuously for long hours and this is taken for granted here. Westerners would not do so. They prefer to separate their work and social lives. This is a conspicuous difference in cultural value. The NETs may feel uncomfortable or puzzled at first, however, the fact is they realize they have a choice not to exhaust themselves at work while the local Hongkongers do not, it was mainly due to the difference between the locals and non-locals in work attitudes and expectations. The NETs can enjoy the benefits and convenience resulted from the diligence of the Hong Kong people. This is a factor that facilitates rather than impedes their adjustment.

(Location: a cafe near to Donna’s place of residence; Time: 8:00pm; Duration: 2 hours)

Many NETs commented that Hong Kong people were very materialistic. It is a “money-oriented” city where people like to “show off”.

“Everything people do is about shopping and eating, it costs money, it can be expensive.” (Johnny)

“Here it’s money oriented. You’re thinking only about money. Earn more, spend more, earn more, spend more.” (Trudy)

“The people, you know, they just need to, to show something.” (Donna)

One respondent noticed that a wealthy dog also “wears a burberry coat, a burberry scarf, for two thousand dollars”. This gave her the impression that the Hong Kong people liked to show off and felt it important that people know.

Many NETs’ sharing also indicated their observation that while Hong Kong people may like to show off, they also like to hide their real feelings from others. It is one aspect of cultural difference that bothered the NETs a lot.

“What is very Hong Kong? like in the west, when people agree with you, they just say yes or OK, but in Hong Kong, the people just say ‘mm’ or nod their heads and you’re supposed to know.” (Donna)

“Wow, Chinese culture is different from where I come from, Australians are very upfront, open. . . .Chinese way, Chinese are very polite, I find it hard to get the straightforward answer from some one, often times they just say maybe maybe. It’s cultural difference. I have to learn, it’s new to me.” (Daniel)

“I notice that people here seldom openly express their feelings. If they’re angry or if they’re sad, they will not express their feelings. In western culture, if you’re angry or if you’re sad, you will tell them.” (Nancy)

They described Hong Kong people as “cosmetic” and “subtle”. They were puzzled because they did not know “what my friends think about me”, “how my boss think of my work”, leaving them wondering “what they mean.” Here is a serious cultural difference the NETs considered hard to adjust to. As a Hong Kong Chinese, I agree very much with their views, I was glad to hear their honest views as it indicated that they felt comfortable to share their feeling openly with me without having to worry about making me feel offended despite my role as the interviewer.

As mentioned, work is another major context where the NETs’ experience occurred. NETs came to Hong Kong mainly looking for a change of job or a better job opportunity. While some found their job very frustrating, others found it very satisfying. Factors that might affect their experiences include intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and cross-cultural differences in educational expectations and practices (Chen, 1994; Irvine and York, 1995).

“The first 2 years I taught in a band 3 school . . . I was fighting with the principal, we were having confronts . . . . I’m leaving.” (Daniel)

“Work remains a daily irritation. . . . (sigh)” (Raymond)

Both NETs found their jobs frustrating. The following were some researcher-notes based on observations at the interviews and reflections on informants’ responses.

6 January 2008: this was the second interview I had, like the previous informant, Raymond made some negative comments about his work, he has worked in Hong Kong intermittently for nearly 10 years, he found his work a constant irritation, but he chose to stay and kept changing schools, the main reason for him to stay was the attractive money return.

*Reflections:* Raymond's tone was very negative and he kept sighing and shaking his head when talking about his work, however, his sharing also made me realize that dissatisfaction with the work alone was not a reason strong enough to drive the NETs away. Raymond still chose to stay, for him, a sense of satisfaction could be got from the monetary return. There are external and internal rewards for a NET's work.

(Location: a café near the residence of the respondent; Time: 2:30pm; Duration: 1 hour)

Many NETs also noticed other down sides of working in Hong Kong, particularly the workaholic syndrome of the Hong Kong people and a lack of democracy in the workplace.

“Here you have a principal, the power figure, and they control everything and everybody under the principal is sort of powerless.” (Machi)

“Principals should not be the dictators of a school.” (Jacky)

They were surprised that the school principals were vested with such great power. The situations were very different back home for them.

12 January 2008: Machi was talking about the differences he found in Hong Kong. He pointed out that the school structure was very different, he meant that the principal has absolute power and control over everything. He explained that in Australia, the school was more government run and policy was more standardized. He found the Hong Kong school systems very bureaucratic and hard to adjust.

*Reflections:* For the NETs, the work structure and system were very different between Hong Kong and the developed western countries. They made constant comparisons between Hong Kong and their home countries. They believed it boiled down to cultural

difference, “it’s Chinese culture that many people work overtime, we’re not Chinese”; “democracy did not exist in HK anyway.” It highlighted one important difference in the cultural value between Hong Kong Chinese and the westerners.

(Location: a cafe in Wanchai where Machi would be attending a workshop organized by the Education Bureau; Time: 2:15pm; Duration: 1 hour)

Research found that expatriate managers from different national cultures have different assumptions about power, authority, and the nature of managing (Hofstede, 1987; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Most participants in this study here found the types and manners of authority in the new workplace different from those in their native workplace environment. These differences were disconcerting for them. Studies found that the similarities and differences of culture can be explained theoretically using various dimensions of cultural variability (Gudykunst, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1990; Hall, 1996). These include individualism-collectivism, high-low uncertainty avoidance, high-low power distance, as well as high-low context orientation.<sup>2</sup>In individualistic cultures, people’s personal goals take priority over group interest or the employer. In collectivism, greater emphasis is placed on the group’s view and needs and there is great readiness to cooperate with in-group members.

Individuals from high power distance cultures accept that people are not equal and social hierarchy is prevalent. There is a greater centralization of power, a greater importance on status and rank. High-uncertainty-avoidance cultures, including most Asian countries, try to avoid uncertainty and ambiguity by providing stability for their members through establishing formal rules, seeking consensus and believing in absolute truths. Low-uncertainty-avoidance cultures consider uncertainty as inherent in life, accept dissent and risks, they value initiative and dislike hierarchical structure (Hofstede, 1980). Hall’s (1984) high-low context orientation explain that in high-context cultures, many of the meanings being exchanged in the process of communication are not transmitted through words, but through gestures or even silence; one reason is the people often have similar experiences,

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<sup>2</sup> The work of Hofstede and others writing in this vein has been criticized for being too generalized, based on biased samples, using simplistic concepts, and for overlooking that point that differences within countries may be greater than differences between countries (e.g. McSweeney, 2002).



perceptions and the like. These people often communicate in an indirect fashion and are more reliant on nonverbal communication (Gudykunst, 1990; Anderson, 1994). In low-context cultures, verbal message contains most of the information and very little is hidden in the context or the participants (Lynch, 1996). Research finds that the Asian mode of communication (high context) is often vague, indirect, and implicit whereas western communication (low context) tends to be direct and explicit (Lynch, 1996).

According to findings (Hofstede, 2000; Meyer, *et al.*, 1997), western countries such as United States, Australia, Britain, Canada where a majority of the NETs in this research came from are inclined towards individualism, low uncertainty avoidance, low power distance, and low context orientation. Asian countries, including China and Hong Kong, are inclined towards collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, high power distance and high context orientation. These dimensions could explain why Hong Kong people are so ‘workaholic’ and obedient to their supervisors and there is little or no democracy in the workplace or why they may also not express their opinions directly. These work aspects are surprising to the NETs. Studies found that people from individualistic cultures are often at odds with people from collective cultures (Forster and Johnsten, 1996).

Many NETs also expressed surprise and frustration towards the differences in the practices of teaching. They found the Hong Kong educational system very different from those in their home countries. They observed differences about the students, the ethos of teaching and school systems as well as the NET scheme.

Firstly, they were surprised by the low standard of the students.

“The students could barely say hello, or whatever, many students from mainland, they had no knowledge of English (sighed).” (Daniel)

“In my school. . . lots of students have no English or poor English, that’s quite surprising.” (Johnny)

In addition to having low abilities in English, the students were also thought to be unmotivated, with serious disciplinary problems.

“They don’t have motivation, they don’t want to learn.” (Nancy)

“Discipline is a problem.” (Johnny)

All the NETs indicated that they were not prepared for the low standards of the students because the people like hotel staff whom they got a chance to converse with during their visits to Hong Kong could all speak fluent English. Communication became a great problem, especially when the students chatted in Cantonese, and the NETs would not understand what they were saying. Many NETs complained that they need to “keep yelling to the students” or “shout at them a lot”, worse still, the disciplinary problem was so annoying that several of the NETs found themselves “very exhausted” and some complained that it was “a wastage of time and energy” of the NETs.

A few of them also pointed out that they found the ethos of teaching in Hong Kong very different from those embraced by the western countries. They disapproved of the textbook focused approach adopted by the schools and local teachers.

“Unfortunately the teachers think they’re only responsible for teaching from the textbooks.” (Daniel)

“In my first year, I was told to follow the textbooks, I disagreed.” (Jacky)

They also found the approach of disciplining the students different as local teachers would punish instead of rewarding students when they tried to correct students’ behavior and the types of punishments administered by the local teachers to the students were often unrelated to the students’ wrongdoings. As Raymond observed, “punishment didn’t match what he did. To choose a subject as a punishment, that is really, really pedagogically wrong. You don’t use a subject as a punishment. It’s unrelated. . . . the HK/Chinese system of education, method of education, philosophy, history, moral, value, everything is the complete opposite, complete antithesis of the west.”

The findings were consistent with previous studies that there was huge divergence in the teaching philosophy between East and West, “the very teaching philosophy in Britain compared to China was a major challenge” (Burnett and Gardner, 2006) and there was huge cultural differences in styles of learning and teaching (Jin and Cortazzi, 1993).

It is worth noticing that a major concern at work for all the NETs in this research is the resistance from schools and local teachers towards changes the NETs were supposed to promote.

“Because like learning things from the Education Bureau (EDB), they wanted to change the school system, going back from the EDB workshops, I said they should try that, they were reluctant to try.” (Jacky)

“The climate of the school is such that when teachers coming in, they want to do things differently, they aren’t supported by the school board. They support the older teachers, we value our experienced teachers, so don’t make trouble.” (George)

“No, absolutely not. No. In ten years, people, local people, local teachers, local system, no, has not changed.” (Raymond)

The process of primary socialization (Deaux, 1993) would enable people of a culture to acquire a set of core values early in their lives that are highly resistant to change, when members of different cultural groups come into contact, conflicts will easily arise due to differences in their core values. Resistance to change in the schools has become the commonest sources of conflict between local teachers and the NETs and adversely affected their work experiences.

Despite this, some NETs had a positive perspective towards the NET scheme due to previous teaching experiences abroad. Jacky was new to Hong Kong and the scheme, but he had taught in similar programmes in Japan. Compared with the JET scheme in Japan, he appreciated the NET scheme in Hong Kong and commended, “The NET scheme in HK is more professional”. He explained that when he was doing the JET programme in Japan, “it’s like we were on holidays the whole time. The schools were not expecting too much.” He found the NET scheme more serious and learned a lot from the experience.

Comparing the NETs’ comments and responses, it was noted that resistance to change was a serious problem and challenge for the NETs at schools. Those like Raymond who had tried but perceived that little could be changed by his efforts became negative of the scheme, others who had tried different ways to alter the situations and perceived that they

have made some impact or changes with varying degrees of success had a more positive view of the scheme. For example, Daniel commented that “it was a tall order or a dream for schools to change”, but he believed he had some positive impact on the students, “there’re lots of resistances to my attempt to change, however, I think I still have some positive influence.” George refrained from taking immediate actions and proposed changes little by little, “If you want to make changes, you have to do it little by little, very small things.” Jacky disagreed with the approach of the local teachers and successfully pushed for changes that brought about positive impact on the school.

Despite the above negative sides, some NETs did find their work satisfying and enjoyable due to many reasons.

“I like it (smile). . . I’d rather finish my current contract.” (Johnny)

“I think teaching is fun (smile).” (Nancy)

“We are a village school, we must be doing some thing very good. . . . All these interesting things keep me here.” (Jacky)

“Teaching English as a second language here is a valuable experience from my point of view.” (George)

During the interviews, it could be observed that the three NETs sounded very positive and excited when they mentioned their work. They found their jobs very satisfying, despite various problems. For example, Johnny was working in a school that would be closed by the government in summer due to insufficient student enrolment; he realized that the overall atmosphere in the school was depressing and local teachers kept leaving, but still he enjoyed the nature of his work and he intended to finish the contract till the very end. Nancy was an air hostess before marrying her husband and was now working as a NET in Hong Kong; she was new to teaching and had problems managing the classroom discipline at first, but after a year she found teaching much fun and she loved the children and enjoyed her work. Jacky obtained tremendous satisfaction from his work because his contribution to the school was widely acknowledged and this made him find his work interesting and rewarding. For George, teaching English taught him many aspects about English that he was not aware of before. From these data, it could be seen that besides money, an external reward Raymond’s mentioned, some NETs could derive their sense of

satisfaction from work because they enjoyed the interaction with the children, made contributions to the school development, and found the experience self enhancing. For the NETs, satisfaction from work could be both internal and external.

As mentioned above, encountering a different culture also enabled some of the NETs to perceive some similarities among the cultures.

“What did you call it? With some meat and soup inside, Shanghai style . . . , with soup inside, this is exactly Georgian style . . . .So the kids said, Ms. <<name>> you eat Chinese food (sounded very amused) . . . I just found that, you know, ‘madaan’ in Georgian means ‘square’, ‘bizi’, the mandarin word, in Georgian it means a man with a big nose. It’s like a funny name. Maybe there are some roots coming from Chinese, I don’t know. (Trudy)

“Most people in the world are good people, do things like you and I do, Australians are same as Chinese in many ways, Chinese are the same as Australians in many ways (smile).” (Daniel)

Trudy managed to perceive some similarities between Chinese and Georgian cultures in aspects like language and food. Daniel considered human nature generally similar, as most people around the world would “raise children, want the children to be happy, buy house, look after the family”.

Literature has always highlighted expatriates’ awareness of cultural differences, such as physical appearance (Paige, 1983), general behaviour expectations (Weaver, 1993), living environment (Barna, 1983), as mentioned above. Bennett (1993) saw dealing with cultural difference as a primary challenge to cross-cultural sojourners. This finding shows that strangers can also be aware of cultural similarities in addition to differences. There may be some truth in the view that nowadays globalization has revolutionized intercultural relationships and the world has become a new “transcultural community” (Agar, 2000; McLuhan, 1968). The traditional definitions of culture may not hold, as the population combination of most countries have become fluid. There may be perceived similarities as well as differences between cultures.

### *Culture Shock*

NETs' comments indicated that when confronted with cultural differences, many of them reported experiences of surprise, discomfort, a feeling of impotence etc. These were actually symptoms of culture shock as observed by Taft (1977) and Oberg (1960),

For example, some NETs have experienced stress, loneliness, confusion, sense of incompetence and insecurity in their adjustment to the work and life in Hong Kong. These symptoms were usually more acute during the initial period of time when they came to live in Hong Kong.

“First day I came, I didn't like it here. . . . I felt very lonely, feeling separated, for me, it was like I was in another planet.” (Trudy)

When she first arrived, Trudy felt “lonely”, “separated” and she felt “like me and aliens surrounding me.” It was because she found “everything new”, and “so many different people”, and she “couldn't understand a word they're saying.” She was particularly unlucky to have lost her job when the dangerous SARS disease gripped Hong Kong and she was also robbed and lost her passport. Therefore she was “stressful” and “afraid”. It was March when the rainy season began, she found the weather “awful” and she was “crashed”.

Nancy also found the first year particularly difficult.

“I feel frustrated or a bit lonely here and sad, a bit isolated. . . . The first year was most difficult.”

Nancy felt “frustrated”, “sad” and “lonely” because she “missed the friendliness of my friends back in Australia,” and she “didn't know how to get around”, she was afraid to walk around by herself “because people would stare at me a lot,” she also “found the language barrier quite difficult,” as she “can't understand the menu” and “it's difficult to find food”, besides she also “didn't have many friends.”

Similarly, Machi also had a hard time immediately when he arrived in Hong Kong.

“I had a very hard time when I first came. I felt I was blind,. . . I thought I was thrown into the deep end.”

Machi was urged to start working by the Education Bureau and the school immediately when he arrived. He was not given much time to settle down nor obtained much support from school to settle in his work, he encountered “a lot of trouble integrating into the school”, he had other problems like “getting the apartment, furnishing, getting the services, things like dealing with gas company, having the phone connected.” These things have “torn my hair out.”

Their experiences were consistent with the aspects of culture shock identified by Taft (1977) in the adjustment to the new culture, including: strains due to the efforts required to make the necessary adaptations; sense of loss and a feeling of deprivation in the new one with respect to such aspects of life as companions, profession, “edible” food; confusion in one’s role and role expectations and in one’s values and feelings of self-identity; a realization of the differences between the cultures, accompanied by feelings of surprise, discomfort, anxiety, or disgust; the feeling of impotence on the part of the stranger owing to unfamiliarity with the cognitive aspects of the culture and inability to perform the necessary role playing skills.

However, it was also noted that not all the NETs experienced those negative feelings when they first arrived, nor were all of them adversely affected by a change of the cultural environment. As mentioned above, globalization has revolutionized the nature and types of cross-cultural contacts. On many occasions, many of the NETs would perceive more similarities than differences between their home countries and Hong Kong and found it quite easy in Hong Kong, and they considered the differences interesting, and were able to perceive the changes and differences positively right from the beginning. Still, many of them thought they had not experienced or were not aware that they had experienced culture shock in Hong Kong.

Jacky had lived in many different cultures before coming to Hong Kong. He found Hong Kong easy to live in for westerners, “I feel that HK is easy, it’s not that different. . . . I’ve been experienced a lot of different cultures, very difficult to have culture shock for me.”

Jacky had not talked about the kinds of frustration other NETs mentioned throughout his sharing. He seemed not to be able to recall any symptoms of culture shock except mentioning about “a bit nervous” before coming. Jacky found Hong Kong “easy” because he has been to many different countries before. He was born in England, but studied in Africa and taught in Japan. He cited two reasons for why he thought it was easy in Hong Kong. Firstly, he had “done a lot of traveling, I’ve experienced a lot of different cultures, very difficult to have culture shock for me”; secondly, he could observe some similarities between Hong Kong and the cultures he has experienced. He elaborated that Hong Kong “was a British colony”, he could communicate easily in English, watch English football, go to English bars etc.

Johnny also thought that Hong Kong was not that different culturally for westerners, “It’s not being that hard for me in HK, actually I think it’s a lot easier in HK than almost other cities”.

Johnny also sounded very merry throughout the interview when he recalled his experience in Hong Kong. He found Hong Kong not hard to adjust to for reasons similar to that of Jacky. He also came from England and has been to different countries including Australia and Japan before coming to Hong Kong. The main reason he gave was that English was so commonly used for communication in Hong Kong. He found it easy to “read English newspapers”, “watch English films and footballs.” He sounded confident that he did not have culture shock in Hong Kong as “I think if you have culture shock in HK, then you’ll have culture shock anywhere.”

Daniel was very pleased with his experiences in Hong Kong and felt himself welcome from the very beginning, “I’ve been very pleased with most of what’s going on. I certainly felt welcome from the start.”



Daniel felt satisfied with his experience, unlike Jacky or Johnny, he has never been to other countries before, he believed it has all to do with his positive attitude. He came to Hong Kong “wanting to learn new things”, and “culturally, I like what I see and learn here”. Even though he found himself to be a minority, “a gweilo”, and observed that the locals would refuse to sit next to him on public transport, he would consider the experience “interesting”.

From the sharing of the NETs, it seems that not all sojourners will experience culture shock in the process of cross-cultural adjustment. As literature reveals, the prediction of culture shock is elusive, it is actually a very subjective experience that depends on the perception of individual sojourners. Studies also showed that perceived cultural similarity would facilitate sojourners’ adjustment abroad as this would help reduce the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty (Torbiorn, 1982; Gudykunst and Kim, 2003), as in the cases of Jacky and Johnny. Moreover, it should be noted that since the NETs were interviewed after they had settled down in Hong Kong for some time, culture shock may be such a brief phenomenon that they have not been aware of its occurrence or even forgotten already. Probably it was only if the symptoms were so obvious that the NETs would be aware of their occurrence, as in the cases of Nancy and Trudy. Culturally shocked or not, the NETs got to react to the changes in a new cultural environment and the following section will discuss the findings from the study.

#### **4.3.3 Responding to Cross-Cultural Differences with Flexibility**

The second key category was ‘responding to cross-cultural difference with flexibility’, and this emerged from the coded data as reported below. Coping may cause extreme exhaustion, but researchers found this exhaustion and stress necessary prerequisites to effective adjustment because intercultural learning cannot occur to a significant extent unless there is at least a partial breakdown of the original mental frame of references, the one constructed in the home culture (Adler, 1975; Brislin, 1981; Grove & Torbiorn, 1993). The NETs identified several vectors in the issues that were coded up in relation to this key category, and the vectors of the several coded components of this key category are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Codes and categories for ‘adopting flexible approaches to coping’.

<b>ADOPTING FLEXIBLE APPROACHES TO COPING</b>		
<b>Properties</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
<b>Problem-focused</b>	<i>Active planning and actions</i>	Immediately to refraining from taking immediate actions from observing the culture to adapting to local practice
	<i>Ignore</i>	From very consciously ignoring to being able to relax
<b>Emotion-focused</b>	<i>Escape</i>	From having a short escape infrequently to taking a long escape regularly
	<i>Accept</i>	From reluctantly to willingly

As mentioned earlier, and as reinforced by the data in Table 4.2, NETs shared differences in their feelings and experiences as well as displayed differences in their responses to the culturally different environment. In face of the changes and differences, the NETs employed multiple strategies with flexibility to handle their issues. Their responses could be classified as problem focused and emotion focused.<sup>3</sup> The former included planning and actions, the latter included escaping or accepting. Planning and actions might be taken immediately or later by themselves or others; emotions might be suppressed or expressed.

#### *Problem-focused Responses*

NETs would try to devise some plans or take actions by themselves or engaging others’ support, either immediately or at appropriate time, when they perceived the situations could be changed.

In general, it was found that NETs would usually want to solve problems on their own if possible, “I can easily talk the way around. . . . You can always talk to people, do it nicely and you can get what you want.” Jacky found that what he wanted for breakfast was not on the set menus of the restaurant. He politely asked the waiter to put the ingredients he wanted into one dish and he got his own “set” breakfast menu, he found it always helpful to explain his meaning slowly and clearly and he would get what he wanted.

<sup>3</sup> This dichotomy was developed inductively by the researcher. Clearly the separation may not be as discrete as the dichotomy suggests.

While Jacky expressed his meaning in English, others like Nancy learnt to pick up some Chinese in communicating her wish, “now I can speak a little bit Chinese, if I really need to, I can. I know the prices, the things, I know where to go.” She found language a barrier when she first arrived. She was always cheated by the merchants when she went shopping as she did not know the prices. She also felt “shy” and insecure when she was alone on the street and she did not know where to get “the things” like small little items such as “threads and needles”. She tackled the difficulty by learning some Chinese. She now learnt the places where she could find items of necessity and could read the prices. She expressed confidence in her tone as she “knows” these things and has the knowledge to solve the problems herself. She is sure she “can” overcome the barriers now.

Sometimes NETs might use nonverbal means to express their meaning. Daniel used gestures to order his favourite dishes at a Chinese restaurant, “I’ve gone through a Chinese restaurant without an English menu, I wanted chicken, I embarrassed my wife, I said I want “gwe gwe gwe”, behaving like the animal, every one laughed, they understood what I wanted, when I am hungry, I know how to get the meal.” There are many ways to get one’s messages across if one wants to. Others like Trudy had similar experiences to share, when she asked an agent to help fix the air-conditioner at home, her Cantonese was not sufficient for her to discuss the technical problem with him, she explained that “we could only communicate by gestures,” and the problem was solved.

Some NETs might have to engage the help of the others if they could not handle the situation by their own efforts. For example, George needed to rely on relatives or friends to take care of his children while he and his wife went to work, “we have some help from my wife’s side of the family, an aunty, but now we have a neighbour and she can drop off my daughter at school, that’s very helpful.”

Likewise, Trudy said, “usually I like to do things I’ve done and knew what it’s like.” If not, she found it helpful to engage others’ help, “If I don’t say properly, I ask my colleagues to write it down for me. . . . If I go to a new restaurant, I won’t go there alone. Together with friends, it’s easy to solve the problems.”

The NETs' responses showed that they would usually get confidence if they had acquired knowledge about the situation. When they were confident, they would handle the situations themselves through verbal or nonverbal means. If they knew that they did not have the ability to handle the situation themselves, they would engage others' help.

### *Emotion-focused Responses*

On the other hand, NETs usually resorted to emotion-focused strategies if they perceived that nothing much could be done to change the situation. They would do so reluctantly or willingly. NETs may try, by various means, to escape from some of the problems confronting them in terms of cross-cultural adjustment to the new environment: ignore or accept the reality, take a break from the local culture, or immerse themselves in doing something they enjoy or try to reinterpret the situation positively.

To ignore the reality and concentrate on one's own business seems to be an easy way for NETs to avoid conflicts or embarrassment and regain their peace of mind.

“When they come to visit us, they don't speak English. I tend to ignore them, doing my own things.” (George)

“People litter, people cut in the queue, people punish children inappropriately. All these negative things, that's the culture. . . . basically I ignore as much as I can.” (Raymond)

George and Raymond could not alter the situations and they chose to ignore the people. George felt that his wife's relatives did not feel comfortable speaking in English with him, having to deal with him made them uneasy, they therefore would only converse with his wife in Cantonese. Since they could not speak English, and he has not learnt much Chinese, he could only ignore them during their visit so that each party did not need to worry about each other. Raymond disliked the habits or customs of the locals, he generalized the behaviours as part of the local culture which was beyond his ability to alter, his tactic is to ignore the people.

Sometimes NETs would try to accept instead of ignoring the reality when they realized nothing much could be done.

“The problem is that people are always leaving, so that’s the problem, I think you just have to accept that.” (Machi)

“I’d think we are guests here, we have to accept the things here. . . . Take everything as it is, don’t try to change anything.” (Trudy)

Machi found it exciting to have the chances to meet with different non-local friends in Central where he was living. Making friends made him happy but also caused him sadness whenever some expatriate friends left Hong Kong. Trudy expressed similar feeling, “some are planning to leave by the end of the year. This has made me a bit upset that I might have to stay alone.” NETs understood that there was no way to ignore the situation and they could only accept the reality. They admitted that the situation was “sad” and “depressing”.

Sometimes, when they could not change the situation, the NETs would try to change their environment albeit temporarily. Taking a break from the local culture was an effective way to help them feel recharged and released.

“Every summer, every summer I go back, I try to recharge the battery, to live in culture that you’re familiar with.” (Raymond)

“sometimes it’s nice to have a break from what I called “real Chinese HK life” being the only western teacher in school, sometimes I feel a little bit isolated, so we can, maybe spend time with English speaking friends, it does help.” (Johnny)

“The people, the crowd, I loved North Point, I found Causeway Bay exciting, now I’m sick of the crowd, I prefer to stay at home on a weekend, I got to think twice before going out.” (Daniel)

Raymond tried to get away from Hong Kong every year to be in a culture which he was familiar with to release his pressure for a while. Johnny would surround himself with friends with similar cultures in Hong Kong so as to get rid of the lonely feeling. Daniel would avoid the crowd by staying at home.

In dealing with situations that could not be altered, some NETs would resort to different means to help themselves stay positive. They might ignore the situation they could not change but adjusted their feeling positively.

“I’m happy just sitting, eating, drinking, watching them talk to each other, or just daydreaming, something like that.” (Johnny)

“Sometimes I was afraid to walk around by myself because people would stare at me a lot. Now, if people look at me, I’ll just ignore them. I don’t mind now.” (Nancy)

Although Johnny and Nancy understood they could not change the people around them, they could not do anything to alter the situations, they would adjust their thinking and happily live with the situation and enjoyed their lives. They ignored the reality but at the same time reinterpreted the situations positively. It is also helpful to change one’s own perspective to reinterpret the reality positively or try to be humorous.

“I am very pleased with my work here, although I have criticisms of the school too. But I think I have a positive influence though there’s a lot of resistance to my attempt to change.” (Daniel)

“in terms of the cultural environment, it’s very different, yea. . . . You just accept that. . . . It’s better to look at everything and laugh.” (Donna)

“I still find some things frustrating, but I find it kind of funny, the things that used to irritate me now make me laugh.” (Machi)

During the interviews, these participants would emphasize their abilities to laugh or actually laugh when they talked about how to respond to the cultural differences that they could not change. Research indicated that having a sense of humour could help manage changes successfully (Kim, 2001; Gudykunst and Kim, 2003). Being able to interpret the reality positively and be humorous could help one get rid of the negative feelings.

On the other hand, other NETs might also resort to escape from reality by immersing themselves in doing something they enjoyed so that they could find ways to release their stress.

“If I’m depressed or upset, I’ll go shopping.... Because I got something to fall on, to get a bit encouragement.” (Donna)

“Make sure you do things for yourself that are not connected so much with the job, for example, take up interesting hobbies.” (Machi)

“I play soccer myself, kind of working out some social and physical outlets for myself and my wife as well.” (George)

The findings show that the NETs responded to the differences in the new cultural environment with great flexibility. When they had the confidence to make changes to the situation, they would take actions themselves or engage other’s assistance to overcome the barriers. If they perceived that the situation could not be altered, they would ignore, accept or escape from the reality. They might do so with a positive or negative attitude.

#### *Varied Patterns of Cross-cultural Adaptation*

Researchers observed variations in sojourners’ responses to cross-cultural adaptation, but they argued about the precise pattern of change and the mechanism of the change (Ward *et al.*, 1998). As mentioned in Chapter 2, many studies believe adaptation is a process in which the characterizations of adaptation stages have been described in “curves” that depicts the patterns of adaptive change over time. For example, Oberg (1960) believed there were four main stages (a) the honeymoon stage; (b) the hostility stage (frustration, anxiety, and hostility toward the host country); (c) beginning adaptation; and (d) thorough adjustment. Arnold (1967) proposed a four-stage model of cultural adaptation similar to that of Oberg, describing a “U” shaped curve in which one’s level of satisfaction and adjustment begins high (spectator phase), drops sharply (involvement phase), begins to rise (coming-to-terms phase), and reaches a level equal to the arrival level (pre-departure phase).

According to the U-curve hypothesis of cross-cultural adjustment, an initial period of elation will be followed by a dip in the level of adaptation when culture shock occurred and then a gradual recovery (Lysgaard, 1955; Deutsch & Won, 1963). In this study, some sharing of NETs supported the hypothesis.

For example, Donna believed she has experienced the above-mentioned four stages in Hong Kong, “There’s an article. . . called the four stages of adapting to Hong Kong. . . . one of them is when you come you’ll struck by its beauty and glamour. You’re totally fascinated and you’ll fall in love with it. Yes, I agree with it.” She thought she had a nice time when she first arrived in Hong Kong, she was taken care of by her aunty and relatives who are locals, and she had very nice colleagues who offered her lots of help at work. She admitted that she found Hong Kong beautiful and fascinating. She was sure that she had experienced an initial period of elation after arriving in Hong Kong. However, as time passed, she realized that her colleagues were very “cosmetic” as they never shared with her their true feelings; she also realized that the Hong Kong people could treat foreigners of darker complexion like her very rudely as “they would yell at me like I’m a Philippino maid.” She found the air pollution unbearable. She acknowledged that she experienced a love-hate feeling for Hong Kong and needed to find a way out, fortunately she found her escape by occasionally retreating to a nearby quiet city in the mainland China where she would not be recognized as a foreigner if she did not speak, she could also release her pressure by immersing herself in shopping. In her escape, she was able to calm down and muster the necessary energy and courage to meet with the challenges in life and work continually. She believed she has learnt adequately about the people and the place after living here for some time and now she is at the stage that she knows how best to live in this cultural environment. She believed she lives comfortably now in Hong Kong, “I understand and I know what I like, what I don’t; entertainment is like easy because I know how to ask for simple things and simple questions; shopping, I know numbers and I know colours, that helps.” She acknowledged that she has passed through the four stages in her adjustment.

Johnny also shared similar stories about his adjustment in Hong Kong, “When you go to a new place, you have the excitement and then you come down a little bit, and you go up, then you understand the culture, stop exciting. The longer you stay, the more level. For me now, it’s more positive.”

29 February 2008: Johnny explained that when he first arrived, he was fascinated by the energy and excitement of the city. He enjoyed a period of elation here in Hong Kong.



However, when he started to live and work here, he came to notice the things he disliked such as the low English standard of his students, the hot humid summer and worsening pollution in the environment. After a dip to the low end, he gradually came to accept the negative aspects of the new culture and found ways to cope. For example, although he did not like the crowd and the resulting pollution, he would appreciate that the crowd “bring many benefits such as the convenience and the development of the city.” During the hot humid summer time, he found himself lucky to be in summer holiday and would travel back home or to other cooler countries to stay away from the heat. He learnt how to live in the new environment and interact with the people, he believed he has gone through the various stages in his cross-cultural adjustment.

*Reflections:* Johnny was convinced that he has gone through the different stages in the adjustment process. It turned out that, like Donna, he had read about these theories before. It might be one reason why he and Donna were both aware of their changes. He described his present stage as “positive”, meaning he had acquired an understanding of the place and the people, learnt the customs, accepted the differences and found a way to live comfortably in the new environment. This echoes Donna’s saying that she “knows how best to live in this cultural environment now.”

(Location: a café near to Johnny’s flat; Time: 7:30pm; Duration: 1 hour)

Actually both Donna and Johnny did not display severe symptoms of culture shock during the crisis period, but they did remember that they had gone through a time from feeling very excited, to rather negative, and then quite positive and happy at the present stage. Literature suggested that in the normalization stage, participants developed a comfort level with the day-to-day life activities and expectations of the environment. They found meaningful ways to adjust and live effectively in the new environment through balancing their personal values with the norms inherent to the non-native culture. The U curve model was also referred to as “recuperation” model by Anderson (1994), “sojourners can just survive, remaining at the discomfort side of the dialectic, but they can also decide to work through it by sticking to the task, carving out a support system, implementing instrumental coping strategies, and accepting new norms, values and attitudes as valid.” The sharing of Donna and Johnny provided some support to the theories. However, the experiences of the

other NETs indicated that other patterns exist in the adjustment process other than a U-curve.

As mentioned above, Nancy, Trudy and Machi had a particularly difficult time when they first arrived in Hong Kong. To them, the typical period of elation did not exist in the initial period of adjustment, they started from a low end and found their situations gradually improved, fortunately, for the three of them, life is pleasant and satisfying after they have overcome the barriers and difficulties in the initial stage of arrival.

“At the very beginning, I didn’t think I could, I had homesick and I wanted to go back Australia. . . but now. . . I like HK, yes, I’ll. . . probably going to spend the rest of my life here.” (Nancy)

Nancy indicated that the first year was very difficult for her, she did not have many friends here, her husband could not take much care of her as he needed to work most of the time, she did not know the language and was cheated repeatedly by the local merchants, she felt uneasy at being stared at by the local people when she walked on the street, and symptoms of culture shock occurred immediately after she arrived in the new cultural environment. However, after 2.5 years, she had overcome many of the difficulties, the situation is totally different, “I’ve made friends here, I’ve got a nice job, and I’ve got a nice husband. . . . Maybe I’ve adapted also to Chinese culture”, now she has become very positive and she has thought of staying in Hong Kong for the rest of her life.

As mentioned, Trudy’s situation was particularly terrible when she arrived and her changes were even more dramatic.

“I came here, but the time was not good for me. . . . awful time for me to stay.... I felt very lonely, feeling separated. . . . I was crashed. . . . I thought, I may stay for three months. . . . after the first year, I thought why don’t finish the contract, after three years, I found Hong Kong is my home! I don’t want to leave!” (Trudy)

4 November 2007: Trudy shared her stories which sounded like a nightmare to begin with. It was the most depressing time in Hong Kong when SARS gripped the city. Her school

was closed, she was left jobless, her passport and wallet were stolen, and the weather in March was hot and humid. She had no friends, did not understand the language or the place, she displayed a lot of culture shock symptoms right after she arrived in Hong Kong. However, the situation improved gradually, she found a stable job, came to establish friendships, learnt a bit of the local language that enabled her to communicate with the locals. She finds her life very comfortable now and considers Hong Kong her home.

*Reflections:* it seemed like a long journey for Trudy as she experienced so many ups and downs in the past 3 years. She experienced the worst time when she first arrived due to the adverse external conditions, she showed that despite a difficult start, one could overcome the difficulties in the adjustment process and came to enjoy the process and the life in the new cultural environment.

(Location: a café near to Trudy's home; Time: 2:30pm; Duration: 2 hours)

The patterns of the cross-cultural journeys of Nancy and Trudy are totally different from that of Johnny and Donna. They felt exceedingly upset soon after they arrived in Hong Kong, however, the situations gradually improved, and their feelings and attitudes became more and more positive. They finally found themselves enjoying life and work here in Hong Kong after the worst time has passed and they are very pleased with their life in Hong Kong now. The pattern of their adjustment may be a rising line that starts from a low end to a high end with some fluctuations in between.

To some NETs like Jacky and Daniel, culture shock virtually did not exist in their experiences in Hong Kong. They did encounter some negative incidents, but these experiences have not caused them too much unhappiness.

“Culturally, I like what I see and learn here . . . most of the experiences have been very positive . . . I definitely felt welcome from the start . . . so my family found coming to HK sort of worrying, but very soon completely at ease about. . . . I can't find things that are seriously negative. . . . Most of the things I see in Hong Kong are fantastic, we love it, it is my home.” (Daniel)

Daniel found his life in Hong Kong very enjoyable right from the beginning, he settled comfortably in a local hotel and had met some nice and supportive colleagues at school. The only thing was that his wife and young son were not with him at the time he arrived. His worry about his family adjustment soon faded as they were able to adapt happily to the environment soon. He was aware of the negative things such as the pollution and lack of democracy in the workplace, however he was also able to appreciate the positive sides such as the internationalism and convenience of the city. He also felt puzzled by things like why the locals would not sit next to him on the public transport and the locals would not express their feelings directly, but to him, it was “interesting to be minority,” and he was willing to “learn the Chinese culture.” After living here for six years, he still found his life enjoyable and he “never regretted his move to Hong Kong.”

To Jacky, Hong Kong was easy to adapt to as it was not that different from his home country and he believed it is difficult for him to have culture shock given his extensive overseas experiences. Despite some conflicts at work in the beginning, he was able to establish himself in his workplace and he found his work so interesting and rewarding that he would stay on continually, “Hong Kong is not that strange...it’s not that different. . . . I’ve experienced a lot of different cultures, very difficult to have culture shock for me. . . . this is my place to live.”

Jacky and Daniel realized the cultural differences that existed, but they were not shocked. They soon found ways to cope with the situations and overall they found their lives “enjoyable” and “exciting” throughout the years they have been in Hong Kong. The pattern of their cross-cultural adjustment is neither a U-curve nor a rising line as described above. It can be described as a horizontal line that starts at a high end and remains rather stably there despite some mild fluctuations.

### *Modes of Adjustment*

The patterns of cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs vary widely. The relationships between immigrants and their hosts can also be very complex and different outcomes of cultural contacts exist. Oberg observed that there were individuals who could not live in foreign countries. Of interest to the present study is the observation of Oberg (1960) and

others that not all overseas workers adjust successfully. The NETs displayed various forms of relationships with the hosts. We shall examine the relationships of the NETs in accordance with the cultural contacts frameworks identified in the literature.

Bochner's (1982) analysis suggests that within-society cross-cultural interactions and between-society sojourner contacts differ in several important aspects. Permanent members of multicultural societies or those intending to become permanent (e.g. immigrants) meet on territories that are joint. Their commitment of new-contacts should be higher because it is long term, and there will be frequent contacts with dissimilar persons, including host members and other migrant groups, including host members. Bochner summarized the findings of the studies and identified four possible types of outcomes resulted from cross-cultural contacts. Individuals caught up in contact situations in which the second culture has higher status may usually reject the original culture to adopt the new culture, this effect is referred to as 'passing'; individuals rejecting the influences of the second culture and trying to hold up to his culture of origin become ardent nationalists and chauvinists. Individuals vacillating between their two cultures can be referred to as the 'marginal syndrome'; persons who are able to synthesize their various cultural identities, and acquire genuine bicultural or multicultural personalities are described as 'mediating persons', which is rather rare.

Similarly, Berry (1992) also developed a framework and classified the responses into four categories similar to Bochner's model: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation is a type of cultural adaptation in which an individual gives up his or her own cultural heritage and adopts the mainstream cultural identity. Separation is a type of cultural adaptation in which an individual retains his or her original culture while interacting minimally with other groups. There are two types of separation, one is chosen by the migrants and the other form of separation is involuntarily forced on the migrant by the dominant society. Integration is a type of cultural adaptation in which individuals maintain both their original culture and their daily interactions with their groups. It happens when migrants feel they want to interact with the host groups while maintaining their own culture. Marginalization is a type of cultural adaptation in which an individual expresses little interest in maintaining cultural ties with either the dominant culture or the migrant culture. The term also describes individuals who are not able to

participate fully in the life in a new country largely due to cultural differences and hence live on the margin culturally. (Martin and Nakayama, 2007)

In addition to the above situations, in some cases migrants may relate to the host country in different modes at different time, adopting a mode of cultural hybridity. They may assimilate on one occasion, but attempt to separate on other occasion, they may integrate at times, and marginalize at other times. Martin and Nakayama (2007) pointed out that, nowadays, many people consider themselves the product of many cultures and hence it would not be easy to classify them into any of the categories. These are also cultural hybrids.

In the present study, the dimension of cultural contacts for the NETs is between members of different societies. They came to stay in Hong Kong for short to medium terms for the purpose of making a life, they are sojourners in this foreign soil and their degree of involvement varied, they may keep their distance by taking the role of observers, they also participate actively in or making contributions to the society. They demonstrated different modes of adjustments in the cross-cultural contacts.

Firstly, some NETs made much effort to experience and fit into the culture despite the differences.

“I’ve soaked up lots of the things we see around. . . . Everything here, we enjoy. . . . I certainly don’t think of going back to Australia.” (Daniel)

Daniel and his wife tried to “soak up the things” in this new culture. They wanted to experience the Chinese culture and have “cultural exchange”, therefore they deliberately lived “in a building full of Chinese” and they are “the only gweilos.” They loved the Chinese food, they enjoyed using chopsticks, and they relaxed through meeting with friends for meals like the Chinese people did. They were so concerned about the place and its people that they have even participated in the local demonstration for democracy.

Nancy has married a Hong Kong man and she is fond of the Asian culture and made up her mind to fit into the local culture here as well.

“I like Chinese culture. . . . maybe I’ve adapted also to Chinese culture, I’ve got to adapt to the HK lifestyle.” (Nancy).

Likewise, despite the culture shock experiences in the beginning, Nancy made efforts to adapt to the new culture and made good progress. She loved the Asian food and preferred to go to the Chinese restaurants, she liked the local clothing and gave up the more sexy western dresses, she celebrated the Chinese festivals like the Chinese new year, the mid-Autumn Festival. She even liked joining the locals for singing karaoke. She behaved like the locals as she was always busy and doing things fast. Her Australian friend noticed her substantial changes when she visited her. After around two years, Nancy believed she’s “got to adapt to the HK lifestyle.”

Other NETs also made efforts to adapt in various aspects. For example, George was willing to fit in the work culture and worked out various systems with his wife to adapt into the daily life, “In my first year of teaching, I’m willing, I have to adapt because it’s my first teaching job. I have to fit in even though the situations were not ideal. . . . There was no real negotiation. . . . We got used to living in a small environment, you can work out a system, work out a way”. He followed the teaching approach of his school without making any complaints although he did not agree to it totally. He lived in a small flat with his family, they worked out various systems to make things work efficiently within the space constraints. For example, his wife would cook while he could use the computer. They would train the children to tidy up their things frequently in the small flat.

Trudy also found herself very much adjusted to the culture in Hong Kong. She made many local friends, ate the Chinese food, used the chopsticks well, picked up some basic language and could even greet the mini-bus drivers in Cantonese. She also felt comfortable working in a very local housing estate where English is not being used. “I’m feeling I am part of HK. . . . everything is fine now. . . . I’ve made HK home.”

The adjustments approach of George, Nancy, Trudy and Daniel fit in the “passing” category of Bochner’s model or the “assimilation” stage of Berry’s model. Culture I

norms gradually lose salience while culture II norms become more prominent. They are willing to give up their own culture and adopt the mainstream cultural practice.

It is interesting to note that on some occasions the assimilation is so strong that there are even symptoms of cultural erosion.

Trudy is surprised that part of her own culture – most obviously the language part – has become “eroded”. She tends to use Chinese in her communication with her brother. She found it necessary to re-learn her native language again!

“It’s funny, I feel so settled here, sometimes when I wanted to say anything, Chinese would come to my mind first, even back home, sometimes when I wanted to say anything, Chinese would come to my mind first, Georgian is my second language, this year I was back home, I couldn’t think in Georgian, so I have to practise Georgian now.”

George did not realize that he has become so accustomed to the physical environment in Hong Kong that the native environment of his home country puzzled him on his home visit.

“When I went to NZ for holidays the first year, the first thing you noticed when you walked on the road was grass. There was grass on both sides, well I thought so much grass, why there was grass on this side and that side? The opposite of HK.”

Moreover, some NETs valued their own culture more in the process of adjusting to the new culture. They maintained their original cultures and their daily interactions with their groups. The migrants wanted to interact with the host groups but were more conscious to keep their own culture. This can be classified as “integration” under Berry’s model. It differs from assimilation in that it involves a greater interest or intention in the part of the migrant to maintaining his or her own cultural identity.



For example, Johnny does not find Hong Kong difficult to adapt into mainly because Hong Kong is an English speaking city. He finds easy access to social life that links to his English culture in Hong Kong and chooses to mingle with English speaking friends.

“People here in HK, almost everyone can speak some English. You can go and watch English football, you can buy English newspaper, everything is quite easy, watch English films. . . . we can spend time with English speaking friends.”

A more extreme outcome of cultural contact is the chauvinistic approach described in Bochner’s model in which sojourners reject the second culture. In this study, Raymond is very insistent that NETs are not here to adapt to the local ways. He maintains a great dividing line between himself and the locals in both his daily living and working.

“NETs are not here to adapt. That’s not part of our job descriptions. . . . have I adapted? No and we’re not supposed to. Otherwise, we’ll become what I say “white face local”, that’s not what we’re here for. . . . you cannot change the culture. . . . I’m not going to change it. . . . I basically just have to ignore it. . . . I don’t want to internalize it or accept it . . . because if I internalize it, I’ll be acculturated.”

He has a strong idea about how to interact with the local people and the system. He keeps the influence of the local culture to the minimum, although he does pick up some local language, what he called “kindergarten Chinese”, it is just enough for survival. He chooses to ignore the cultural parts he does not like such as “people cutting queue, spitting on the ground”. He adopts a clear “dividing line” in his approach not to adapt into the culture because “to me adapting implies acculturating, being like the local people and so on.” He is conscious to maintain his own identity and he will not want to become a “white face local”. Raymond’s attitude may also be classified as voluntary separation under Berry’s model (Martin and Nakayma, 2007).

It has been observed from this research that NETs have responded flexibly to the new cultural environment. Seldom would they adopt a single mode of adjustments here. Researchers actually found that migrants may also relate to the host country in different modes at different time, adopting a mode of cultural hybridity. They may assimilate on

one occasion, but attempt to separate on another occasion. They may integrate at times, and marginalize at other times. Some of the NETs also display this mode of cultural contact in the study. The following are some examples illustrating this hybrid mode of adjustment adopted by many NET informants.

While Machi enjoys his life thoroughly in the city centre, he is pleased to explore the different local places and to feel the exotic atmosphere here, he appreciates the differences and loves the new cultural experiences, “Involve yourself, got to all the different places. . . . don’t just come and do your job and go home, this place has really fascinating markets like the one we’ve passed, very exotic. . . . different places have different smells.” In his work, he would try his best to work with the school and teachers, “the experience of working in HK school, and the way it works, or doesn’t work, is eye opening, working with the local teachers, and different ways that everybody does thing again is eye opening, I love it.” However, he tends to mingle with non-local friends and does not intend to learn the local language in his communication, “I met a bunch of new people that became very good friends. . . . non-local people, Singaporeans, Philipinos, Malaysians.... I am scared of Chinese.”

In another case, George tries very hard to adapt into the work culture and he and his wife have worked out different systems to fit in the local culture. However, in his social life, he lives rather marginally on his own as he is not able to make many friends or socialize with colleagues after work due to his marital status and family obligations, “I’ve got some constraints. . . . If my wife is doing the same thing, she will not mind. But I’m going on my own and she’s not, I don’t feel that good. The kids are still only 6 or 7 years old, so there’s a lot of organization. . . . I don’t really have time, I have to go home . . . . that’s the marry thing. . . . I’m not a man who needs many friends anyway.

Under Bochner’s model, it is possible for migrants to synthesize their various cultural identities and acquire genuine bicultural or multicultural personalities. Bochner (1982) described these people as “mediating persons”, it is a situation Berry called “integration” as the individual is able to maintain both their original culture and their daily interactions with their groups. Some NETs do demonstrate these qualities and abilities.

As mentioned, Nancy feels that she is very adapted to the local culture. However, she also realizes that there is something she will only do back home due to the differences in the cultural environment, “Maybe I’ve adapted also to Chinese culture. . . . I think because I’m a westerner, no matter how long I stay in HK, there’ll always be that part of me that has western culture that I can’t let go of.” What she meant was that she could not feel totally relaxed in the environment in Hong Kong. She could spend three hours with friends at a café in Australia but not Hong Kong as “everything is so rush.” She’s also given up the “sexy clothing” she used to wear in Australia in favour of the more conservative local dresses. But she would feel comfortable doing so again when surrounded by western friends back home.

Likewise, Donna understands the attitudes of the locals and how to behave properly in the new culture. Because of her unique skin colour, people might treat her either as a respectable English speaking expatriate or a detested Philippino maid depending on how she dressed. She would feel upset when being treated rudely, but in turn she learns to elicit positive reaction by dressing more decently like a genuine expatriate. So for Donna, “I get the two sides of HK in that sense, because of how I look.” She also learns that even though her white expatriate friends may seemingly be treated respectfully by the locals, they would be charged higher prizes at the shops they patronize while she would not. She learnt the pros and cons of being a white face expatriate in Hong Kong. Moreover, she learns to observe some social values in Hong Kong, for example, women are supposed to be “a bit more polite to be a little more quiet.” She learns from the Hong Kong people that, “it is better to be very polite than to just always speak the things you think.” At the same time, she knows she has her own western perception and she would “tell you my opinion, maybe we can work something else, we can do something different.” She would try to do that nicely to get her way while trying not to make others feel uncomfortable. After living in Hong Kong for around 1.5 years, she believes that, “I know the things I like and I want and something I don’t like, I don’t want.” She knows how to act properly while maintaining truthfulness to herself.

According to Byram (1997), components of intercultural competence include knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds for belonging to a given social group. NETs like Donna and Nancy have learnt the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values

of the locals while they also understand what they want. They try to behave or adjust their actions in a way that they can get what they want but also express their respect for the different culture. They have tried their best to integrate into the new culture while retaining some important aspects of their home culture. As researchers (Sparrow, 2000; Shaules, 2007) found, intercultural learning is closely related to a feeling of connectedness to particular cultural communities.

However, researchers have also argued about the possibility of one being truly bi-cultural. Paulston (1992) pointed out that it is also possible for one to learn to function with a different system. Donna and Nancy indicated their happiness to learn and live the local ways. Donna said, "The nice things about Hong Kong, I am influenced by the Hong Kong." Although Nancy found big differences between Chinese and Australian cultures, she said, "I'm quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt." However, it seems true that even if an individual can appreciate the different values of another culture, individuals would 'pick and choose' and there are some aspects of culture that are "beyond modifications" (Paulston, 1992).

For example, Nancy realized that, "I think because I'm a westerner, a part of me will always be westerner, no matter how long I stay in HK, there'll always be that part of me that has western culture that I can't let go of." She meant that some habits like having some western breakfast together, having a coffee, some toast, or bringing each other chocolates like western people do. She could only do those things naturally, "when I go back to Australia, then I'll release my western culture and then I'll do things that I used to do." For Donna, although she tried to be more polite and speak out her mind a little slower, she would still prefer "to speak my mind" because her deep-rooted "western perceptions."

The NET informants have been very flexible in coping with the cultural changes. They employ problem-focus approach when they perceived that something positive can be done to alter or improve the situations. They would resort to emotion-focused coping when they perceived that not much can be done to change the reality. There are great variations in the cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs, they display different patterns of adjustments, varying from a U-shaped curve to a rising or horizontal line. The results of their cultural contact also vary greatly. Not every NET has or is aware of the occurrence of culture

shock symptoms in the adjustment process. They may try to maintain their own culture, integrate into the second culture, synthesize the two different cultures or even adopt different approaches at different time. Some NETs may display symptoms of being bicultural while others have experienced cultural erosions. The varied patterns of adjustment may lend additional support to the views of Agar (2000) and McLuhan (1968) above, particularly prior cross-cultural experiences apparently played a significant role in influencing the process and modes of adjustments of the NETs. According to the literature, many factors may affect the adjustment of the expatriates in a culturally different environment. We shall discuss the sharing of the NETs against the literature findings below.

#### 4.3.4 Self-enhancement and transformation

The third key category that contributes to the core category is self-enhancement and transformation. All NETs believed that after going through the cross cultural experiences, they came out a different person through learning and changes that ranged from small to substantial. The NETs identified several vectors in the issues that were coded up in relation to this key category, and the vectors of the several coded components of this key category are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Codes and categories for ‘self enhancement and transformation’.

<b>SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION</b>		
<b>Properties</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
<b>Learning</b>	<i>Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from surface to deep</li> <li>- from ethnocentric to ethnorelativistic (i.e. holding a western perspective to understanding or adopting the eastern perspective)</li> <li>- from dependent to independent</li> </ul>
	<i>Knowledge</i> (language, cultures etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from superficial to deep</li> <li>- from little to substantial</li> </ul>
<b>Changes</b>	<i>Attitude</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from worrying to feeling enjoyable</li> <li>- from having home sick to having sense of belonging</li> <li>- from feeling proud to humble</li> <li>- from feeling unfamiliar to comfortable</li> <li>- from feeling disoriented to having sense of competence</li> <li>- from feeling resistant, shocked to tolerating or accepting</li> </ul>
	<i>Behavior</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from negative to positive</li> <li>- from dependent to independent</li> <li>- from being aloof or shying away to finding ways to accommodate or integrate</li> </ul>

Table 4.3 indicates that not only was this an important category, but that the moves from the starting point in arriving in Hong Kong to becoming more established were marked by many changes and transformations over time in terms of self-enhancement.

## *Learning*

In the comments received from the NETs, learning comes out as an important theme.

“culturally, I like what I see and learn here. . . . most things you have to learn by getting into the situation.” (Daniel)

“Everything that happens, you have to look at it as a learning experience.” (Donna)

“When you go to different countries, you’re always learning.” (Jacky)

They have learnt many different things about Hong Kong. Some were pleased to learn about the language, the people and the culture.

In some studies, organizations reported that language fluency was one of the competencies considered important in a good expatriate candidate (Mukuda, 2001;). However, when expatriates were offered preparatory training, these training programmes were typically limited to less than or equal to one week, less than one-third of which was focused on language and culture (Runzheimer, 1984; Mukuda, 2001). Authors and researchers in fact argued strongly for more investment in language training (Tung, 1981; Solomon, 1994; Dunbar, 1994). The participants in this study never received training in the local language before or after arrival in Hong Kong. They had acquired at least a rudimentary knowledge of the language that enabled them to feel more at ease in meeting the demands of their daily lives. They did experience some inconvenience and difficulties due to their inability to speak or understand the local language, particularly in the beginning stage of their adjustments. Ying and Liese (1991) found lower levels of depression in students who had acquired proficiency in the host nation’s language. However, all the NETs found that learning the local language was not important for survival in Hong Kong.

“I think it’s a lot easier in HK than almost other cities, maybe other non English speaking cities. People here in HK, almost everyone can speak some English.” (Johnny)

“But the other advantage of HK, being officially bilingual, if you have official business, you may conduct it in English. Street signs, post offices, government agencies, yes, are written in English, you can cope and deal in English.” (Raymond)

“I don’t imagine I’m going to learn the language unfortunately. But you don’t need that as almost everyone can speak some English here.” (Daniel)

But some did perceive value in learning the language. Acquiring the language skills enhanced Trudy’s sense of belonging to Hong Kong. She could easily communicate with the locals such as the mini-bus drivers and felt a sense of competence like being able to order food from the menus at restaurants. Johnny realized that learning the local language would enrich his cross-cultural experience because it enabled him to understand more about the local people and culture, and being able to communicate with his students in Cantonese would shorten the distance between them and in turn enhance their relationships.

“You can enjoy life in HK without Cantonese, but if you can learn Cantonese, you can enjoy a lot more, I feel I am a part of Hong Kong.” (Trudy)

“If my students know what I’m studying, they would think you care about our language, you care about us.” (Johnny)

“I was really shy, and then sometimes I found the language barrier quite difficult. . . . But now, it’s getting better, maybe now I can speak a little bit Chinese. . . . I know the prices, the things, I know where to go. (Nancy)

The NETs’ sharing is consistent with prior research findings. Paige (1993) agreed that the ability to speak the target language is not always absolutely essential, but lack of relevant language skills may result in social isolation and frustration. Language is the major mechanism through which culturally different groups can communicate and share their feelings and meaning. Language is an effective channel for one to enter into a new culture.

In addition to local language, the NETs also treasured the opportunities to learn their skills of teaching English as a second language.

“Teaching English as a second language here is in fact a valuable learning experience.” (George)

“In the first school, the students could barely say hello. . . . they had no knowledge of English, that was a big learning curve (Daniel)



“Here in HK, the NET scheme is much more professional. I enjoy that, I’ve learned a lot.” (Jacky)

George found the teaching experience valuable because he had gained a degree in science prior to coming to Hong Kong but had always loved arts subjects, and, through teaching English here, he could explore more about the English language and “addressed his own weakness in English through teaching the subject.” Daniel learnt from teaching because he did not have knowledge or “training in phonetics” before. Jacky found the professional NET scheme much more professional than the JET scheme he participated in in Japan, he was provided with many useful training materials prepared by the Education Bureau for NETs; while he first only had a minimum qualification, he had upgraded his knowledge and qualifications by taking a teacher training course from the University of Hong Kong.

From the people, they also learnt about the Hong Kong culture, which is “cosmetic”, and “subtle”.

“In the beginning, I had a very picturesque image of Hong Kong, everyone is nice, friendly, wonderful, and perfect. . . . It’s only now after the first year that you start to see what it’s like. . . . I’ve learnt the people now. . . . Cosmetic is quite a Hong Kong culture to me.” (Donna)

By “cosmetic”, Donna meant that Hong Kong people liked to hide their real selves and put on a perfect face always. This accord with the significance attached to ‘face’ in Chinese culture (e.g. Bond, 1991). In Chinese culture, face giving and face saving are important features (‘face’ defined as ‘the public self-image that every member of a society wants to claim for himself’ (Bond, 1996: 83). Further, the concept of loss of face or ‘shame’ is powerful in Chinese culture. Shaffer *et al.* (1999) reported it to be more developed in Asian than western cultures, and Li (1995) found that the Chinese have 133 words for shame. Face management is central in maintaining relationships and harmony in Chinese society, and may be even more important than being honest and truthful (Bond, 1991).

Donna noticed that Hong Kong people always appeared to be polite, obedient to their supervisors and helpful to the colleagues, only when they thought nobody were around

would they express their dissatisfaction and anger. She was shocked to learn how Hong Kong people could change faces so quickly. Other NETs shared similar observations.

“Maybe the way of thinking. I notice that people here seldom openly express their feelings. If they’re angry or if they’re sad, they will not express their feelings. So sometimes here it’s difficult to read my friends’ mind, I don’t know what to say to them, and I don’t know how they think about me. I have to learn.” (Nancy)

“Wow, Chinese culture is different from where I come from.... Chinese way, Chinese are very polite, very subtle. I find it hard to get the straightforward answer from some one, I got to chase, it’s different, it’s new to me, I got to learn.” (Daniel)

Participants observed the new patterns of behaviour and expressions in social or work relationship. These differences made them puzzled as they deviated significantly from those used in their home countries. Researchers found that there were differing degrees of affective display, or visible emotions among cultures (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998). All cultures have their own nonverbal relational signs and symbols such as gestures, facial expressions, voice tone (Stewart and DeLisle, 1994). They observed that as relational cues are “seldom the subject of formal study”, nonverbal behaviour would easily become a potent factor of intercultural misunderstanding.

It appears that the ability to express oneself in another language is necessary, yet not sufficient, competency for understanding and communicating with those in another culture (Hall, 1983; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Weaver (1993) believed that learning the verbal and nonverbal language in the context of the culture is important for one to attain greater cross-cultural understanding.

For the NETs, another valuable learning in their cross cultural journey is the discovery of the self. They also valued the opportunities to learn about different things in a new culture and became more appreciative of the cultural differences and/or similarities.

“I must say, I discover myself. To stay alone in HK was discovering myself.” (Trudy)

By discovering herself, Trudy meant that she realized she could forgo her home country to live in another place with much more ease than she thought. She described herself as a ‘survivor’ as she was alone without any friends at first. She felt herself “surrounded by aliens” and felt “crashed”. But now as she has successfully established her life and learnt about the people and the place, she sounded pleased and satisfying as she took stock of her life and shared with me her survival experiences. She realized she could be adaptable if needed, and that she is a person who prefers to stay positive in face of adversities. She discovered the sides of herself she never knew before going through the experience.

The theme of self discovery kept appearing in other interviews.

“I think because I’m a westerner, a part of me will always be westerner, no matter how long I stay in HK, there’ll always be that part of me that has western culture that I can’t let go of.” (Nancy)

Nancy believed she was very adapted to Hong Kong. However, she realized that there was something she would only do back in her home country, she said, “maybe when I go back to Australia, then I’ll release my western culture and then I’ll do things that I used to do to.” Those things mainly concerned the style of living like ‘spending three hours at a café with friends’, or ‘bringing each other chocolates like western people do with friends’.

“The most meaningful thing I think is I got to know the other side of me. . . . I got a lot of western perceptions.” Donna found that she could not force herself to be as “cosmetic” as the Hong Kong people do, she would not say yes to everything to her supervisors would always speak her mind.

The findings revealed that NETs learnt about themselves through their altered behaviours and perceptions and the sojourn was a journey of self discovery for many.

### *Changes*

The NETs were also aware of changes in many aspects after living and working in a culturally different environment, although the degree and level may vary.

Firstly, there are changes in their way of thinking.

“Maybe I’ve adapted to Chinese culture, maybe my thinking is more like the local Chinese here compared to a westerner.” (Nancy)

By way of thinking, Nancy meant that she was more ‘conservative’ and less ‘open’ as she was before, her thinking was manifested in her behaviour such as she preferred local clothing which was much less sexy than the western styles.

“I try to be understanding of what happens around me, and be intolerant.” (Machi)

Machi was more understanding and tolerant of the things happened around him. Before he came, he did not understand why it took several months for the government and the school to process his application, now he understood that the administration here in Hong Kong were much more bureaucratic when compared with those back in Australia. He has become more tolerant and accepting to the procedures required. He changed from being “fixed about something” to “see the thinking behind the things that happened.”

Some NETs also realized changes in their feelings.

“I had a very hard time when I first came . . . after I settled in and established my place in the job role, then everything changed. . . . so that’s a change for me. . . Oh, I love it, I love it (excited and smile).” (Machi)

Machi encountered a lot of trouble integrating into the school when he first came; after overcoming the difficulties, he realized he has changed from “feeling insecure, unsure and depressed at different point, especially in the beginning, and a bit anxious, to being very comfortable and enjoying it a lot.” He sounded very excited and happy when he shared his experiences with me, there was no trace of discontent or regret in his tone.

“When I first came here, I felt very lonely, feeling separated . . . but after the first year, I thought why don’t I finish the contract and then go home, after three years, I found Hong Kong is my home! I don’t want to leave!” (Trudy)

Likewise, Trudy felt she was “in another planet” when she first came. She felt “lonely”, “separated”, “crashed”, but now she felt “I’m being a part of Hong Kong” and would miss this city if she was to leave.

“Sometimes I feel frustrated or a bit lonely here, and sad, sometimes I feel a bit isolated. . . . But now, it’s getting better. . . . I should appreciate what I have got.” (Nancy)

Nancy also experienced many culture shock symptoms when she first came. Her husband did not have time to take care of her, she did not know where to go and found herself always cheated by the merchants if she went shopping. But she kept learning the people, the place and the culture, now she felt very appreciative that she has “made a big move, established some friendships, got a nice job”. She felt very pleased with her move and would “probably stay in Hong Kong for good” with her husband.

Others found their behaviours changed in small or big ways, owing to the influence of the environment and the local people.

“I’ve definitely become more independent and more responsible. . . . Now I prefer to go to Chinese restaurant. I celebrate the Chinese festivals like Chinese new year, the mid-Autumn Festival. And I like the karaoke.” (Nancy)

Nancy’s change was particularly obvious when her friend came to visit. Her friend told her, “wow you’ve become so responsible now,” she observed that Nancy was “always busy . . . doing everything very quickly.” Actually Nancy spoke at a very fast pace too at the interview. She also realized that she liked the Chinese festivals and picked up the local hobbies like singing karaoke. Like she said, she “has adapted to the Chinese culture.”

“I’m not that quick to react. I’m much more polite, Hong Kong people are so polite. I learn to be more patient, because there are so many people in Hong Kong, so you must be patient. . . . I am a lot calmer now, I am don’t angry very quickly. . . . .I’ve become much greener. . . . . I’ve been influenced by the people and also influenced by Hong Kong.” (Donna)

Donna realized her behaviours changed due to the influence of the locals. For example, she would line up in a queue because there are always queues everywhere. She realized that her colleagues and friends were always polite or “cosmetic” towards each other, they would not express their unhappiness or dissatisfaction directly, she was not used to hiding her feelings, but she learnt to speak her mind in a more polite way. She also became “more eco-friendly” like putting the rubbish into different environment collection boxes and used less plastic bags.

The NETs found the experiences edifying and life changing to them. Their thinking, feelings and behaviors changed in big or small ways. They came through the experiences no longer the same person. When the sojourners attain the highest possible levels of cultural adjustment, they may have undergone more profound changes than merely passing through a cycle of adjustment. (Grove and Torbiorn, 1993).

Many researchers agreed that cross-cultural experiences prompted learning and growth in sojourners. Some researchers viewing cross-cultural experiences as progressing in stages tended to view these experiences as a learning experience to intercultural sojourners despite the anxiety or pain to be experienced during the adaptation process (Kao, 1975; Heath, 1977; Adler, 1987; Wrightsman, 1999). Kim (1988, 2001) developed a theory of stress-adaptation growth dynamic to illustrate the process of intercultural transformation. She explained that when the environment continued to threaten internal conditions, individuals would feel it necessary to meet the challenge by adding to the existing system of ideas and reconfiguring it into a new set of coping abilities, and these adaptive responses would lead to subtle internal growth as individuals work out new ways of handling problems.

Bennett (1993) presented a six-stage model that described intercultural sensitivity in which individuals might move from ethnocentrism stages: denial, through defense, to minimization, to ethnorelativism stages of acceptance, adaptation and integration. In the ethnocentric stages and their sub-stages, individuals would preserve their own worldview. In the ethnorelativistic stage, individuals try to understand cultures in relation to each other, they learnt about the cultural differences, moved beyond the ethnocentrism stages to the ethnorelativism stages to achieve learning and growth.

In this study, most participants found their experiences meaningful and eye opening though not all found it enjoyable. As studies found (McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002), learning occurred in expatriates' cross-cultural sojourns, the themes usually included learning to deal with cultural matters, differences and similarities of cultures, speak the foreign language, and general living and working in a foreign environment. The NETs agreed that they learned a lot about the environment, the people, the city, the culture, it was also a sojourn of self-discovery. As Bennett's model finds, they moved from their own worldview to learn about the cultural differences or similarities by immersing themselves in the new environment.

Participants in this study also found the cross-cultural experiences life-changing as literature found (McCall and Hollenbeck, 2002). They described themselves as more cosmopolitan, acquiring broader perspectives, more tolerant and understanding, more self-confident, more responsible, more independent, becoming appreciative of cultural differences and similarities. They also found their experiences positive and having no regret of their move like many previous studies found (Mukuda, 2001). In earlier research studies, expatriates described their experiences as "life-changing," similar to a religious experience in profoundness, sublimeness, and personal significance (Adler, 1987; Guthrie, 1975). Participants also highly valued the significance of the experiences to their development.

#### **4.3.5 Factors that may affect cross cultural adjustment**

The NETs realized many changes and differences or some similarities in the new culture; they reacted differently depending on the situations with flexible strategies and they came through the experiences with more understanding of themselves and the culture and

acquired new perspectives on life. There are many factors in play during the process of cross-cultural interactions. These include factors such as attitudes, marital status and age, cultural background, knowledge and skills as well as support from others. The NETs identified several vectors in the issues that were coded up in relation to this key category, and the vectors of the several coded components of this key category are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Codes and categories for ‘factors that affect cross-cultural adjustment’.

<b>FACTORS THAT AFFECT CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT</b>		
<b>Properties</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>
<b>Personal factors</b>	<i>Attitude</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from resistant to change to open and flexible</li> <li>- from negative to positive</li> </ul>
	<i>Marital status</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from single to married with young children to married with grown up children</li> </ul>
	<i>Age</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from young to approaching retirement age</li> </ul>
	<i>Perceived cultural distance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from small to big</li> </ul>
<b>Others’ support</b>	<i>Family &amp; relatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from having none to some families and relatives support</li> </ul>
	<i>Friends</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from having a few western to many friends (both western and local) to support</li> <li>- from having friends with negative attitudes to friends with positive attitudes</li> </ul>
<b>Skills</b>	<i>Job</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from feeling incompetent to competent in these skills and knowledge</li> <li>- from having none to many years of teaching experiences</li> </ul>
	<i>Language</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from knowing none to a little bit Chinese/Cantonese</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledge &amp; prior experiences</b>	<i>Knowing the environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from having none to some knowledge and experiences</li> </ul>
	<i>Prior experiences</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HK culture (through visits or Asian friends’ sharing)</li> <li>- prior knowledge of other culturally different countries</li> </ul>	



<i>Cross-cultural training</i>	- none to some training through the workshops organized by the Education Bureau of HK
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Table 4.4 indicates that there were very many factors that affected cross-cultural adjustment, all of which could be considered as vectors, i.e. having strength and direction.

#### *Attitudes, Marital Status, Age, Cultural Background*

Literature has reported many personal factors that might affect the cross-cultural adjustments of sojourners. Personality based studies have looked at personal traits in an attempt to explain expatriate success (i.e., adjustment). Among them, willingness to communicate, cultural flexibility, positive affectivity, and showing tolerance, etc., were reported collectively to have strong positive effects on various facets of adjustment (Black, 1990; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001). In contrast, psychological adjustment problems associated with authoritarianism and decrements in overall satisfaction have been related to dogmatism (Taft and Steinkalk, 1985). There were also suggestions that individuals differ in the coping process due to stable coping “styles” or “dispositions” that people bring with them to the stressful situations. Coping strategies regarded to be functional seem to be linked to personality qualities that are widely regarded as beneficial (MaCrae, 1982; Carver *et al.*, 1989). In this research, several personal factors were identified to have affected the adjustments of the informants, including their attitudes, age, marital status, and cultural backgrounds.

The NETs came to Hong Kong on their own choices for different purposes:

- *Looking for a change:*

“So, probably time I need a change.” (Daniel)

“I wanted a change.” (Donna)

- *Attractive job offer:*

“I needed a job. . . . I needed the money.” (Jacky)

“I was teaching English back home, but the salary was unsatisfactory.” (Trudy)

- *Family reasons:*

“Children factors, for my son and daughter to firstly get to know my wife’s side of family, secondly, to learn her language, Cantonese and putonghua.” (George)

“I married to my husband in HK.” (Nancy)

- *Interest in the city:*

“I came to HK about 5 years ago when I was teaching in Japan. I really like HK.” (Johnny)

“I taught in a suburb in Scarborough, there was a huge influx of Hongkongers, they’re leaving HK before 1997. . . . I was intrigued, I wanted to come to HK to find out more about them, about Hongkongers.” (Raymond)

“One of my colleagues in the programme has a friend who’s doing the NET scheme in HK and I found it interesting.” (Machi)

However, despite their voluntary migration, their attitudes towards adjustment in the city varied, ranging from rigid to open, negative to positive. Some of them were resistant to changes while others embrace changes excitingly. As literature revealed, it was also found in this research that NETs having attitudes that were open, positive, flexible, and appreciative generally found their lives more comfortable and enjoyable in Hong Kong than those who were not.

Raymond, who had been living and teaching in Hong Kong for nearly ten years, was the most resistant to change in his attitude. He insisted adamantly, “we, NETs, are not here to adapt. That’s not part of our job descriptions.” He had been to other western cultures before and he considers himself “very adept at adapting to wherever I have to be living,” however, he is sure that “after ten years, I have not become acculturated.” It is true that he has also appreciated the benefits or positive side of living in this city, such as its convenience, internationalism and attractive job package; however, he mentioned there are some aspects of the culture he strongly disliked, such as “people cutting the queue”, and

“people spitting on the street”. He concludes that, “no I would say adapt and acculturating is too strong, so, familiar with, like a survivor, more familiarization”. It indicates that he deliberately opts not to adapt to this eastern culture “because to me adapting implies acculturating, being like the local people and so on. . . . that’s the dividing line.” His impression of Hong Kong is heavily clouded by the negative aspects that he cannot accept and he chooses not to integrate or assimilate. From his sharing, he sounded particularly frustrated with his work in Hong Kong and as he said, he lives just like a “survivor” here.

However, most of the NET participants adopt attitudes that are flexible and open and they enjoyed their lives much more in this city. They are aware of the importance of a positive attitude on their adjustments.

“I think everything depends on your attitude. Yea, be flexible.” (Daniel)

Daniel repeatedly highlighted the importance of the effect of attitude on his adjustments. He believed “attitude is the first thing that makes our move successful.” The attitudes of him and his wife are “willing” and “flexible”. He meant that they “want to learn new things”, they “want to live among Chinese people”, and they “want the cultural exchange.” Like other NETs, he did encounter some negative things here such as “being regarded as minority” as the locals would not want to sit next to him because he is a “gweilo” and he “had conflicts with the principal at school” because of a different education ethos. However, Daniel perceived that “things have been very positive for us” so far and he and his wife “never regretted their move” to Hong Kong.

Some NET participants may not have been as fortunate as Daniel to have experienced so many positive things in Hong Kong. However, they are also able to overcome the difficulties and enjoyed their lives in Hong Kong later on because of their attitudes.

Nancy knew no friends except her husband in Hong Kong when she first arrived. She always felt “lonely” and “depressed” as her husband did not have much time to take care of her and his friends could not speak much English. Another great challenge for her was to handle the teaching job that she had not expected to be so demanding in terms of her time and stamina. Nevertheless, after staying in Hong Kong for two and a half years, she

realized that her open attitude and ability to appreciate what have happened helped her go through the difficulties and stay positive, “So I’m quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt.” She accepted the Chinese culture, she ate Chinese food, made Chinese friends, dressed like the locals and adopted their habits such as “acting very fast” and “going to karaoke.” She found her life enjoyable by adapting into the local culture. Overall, she had a positive attitude that enabled her to appreciate what she had in Hong Kong instead of what she may have missed back home, “I’ve got a nice job, and I’ve got a nice husband, I should appreciate what I have got.”

Machi has also shared about his bad experiences when he first arrived in Hong Kong. He reported for duty late at school as the government had taken a long time to process his application. When he arrived, the school pushed him to start teaching immediately without giving him much time to settle down or providing him much orientation about his work, he had a very frustrating time as he said, “I was like blind . . . being thrown into the deep end.” However, Machi believed that staying positive and optimistic help him overcome the difficulties at the end. Now Machi is able to enjoy life thoroughly in Hong Kong, “Oh, yea, not to panic about those kinds of things, just accept it and grow with it, ‘cause everything turns out in the end.”

As mentioned, Trudy was the most “unlucky” one among the NET participants as she came at a time when Hong Kong was gripped by the epidemic of SARS. But now Trudy enjoys her life in Hong Kong and considers here her home, “Maybe my attitude is very positive. . . . I am not a person who will let myself depressed for long, now I’ve made HK home.”

Echoing the importance of holding an open attitude, Jacky said, “the experience is when you go to different countries, you’re always learning, don’t go with previous learnt ideas.” Donna’s remarks aptly sum up the situations of the NETs living in an Asian culture. She believed having an open and positive attitude is most helpful, “Asia is a foreign culture. That’s really important to appreciate that. If you don’t look at things positively, it makes life more difficult. . . . yea, be positive, enjoy it, have fun.”

The experiences of Trudy and many other NETs showed that negative experiences in cross-cultural adjustments could be overcome. A positive attitude may be one of the most important factors for successful cross-cultural adjustment.

Another factor identified from the data concerns the marital status of the NETs. Most of the NETs were single, three were married with young children in Hong Kong or grown up children abroad. From their comments, it could be seen that it was much easier to manage one's life in a foreign culture if one were single.

“I think it's easy to get used to. Specially like me, I'm single. No problem.” (Jacky)

“I think HK is a fantastic place if you're young, if you're single or in a relationship.”  
(Johnny)

The NETs meant that, being single, they could migrate to Hong Kong without too much concern. They could devote their efforts and time to their jobs and mingle well with friends as they liked. Both of them had a girlfriend in Hong Kong and found much support in the relationship while they have much less practical constraints when compared with those who were married.

For example, George was among the minority who was married with young children in Hong Kong. He realized that it was much easier if one were single: “I would say if you're single, it'll be a lot easier.” He had many constraints in various aspects of his life because of family obligations. He would feel uncomfortable if he went drinking with colleagues after work as “if my wife is not doing the same thing, I don't feel that good”. He had a family to take care of, like he “can't do courses, the kids are still only 6 or 7 years old, so there's a lot of organization.”

Marriage was a constraint for NETs because family members' adjustment was also a major concern for them. For Daniel, initially his wife joined him late and his youngest son had to follow them to study in Hong Kong; he was worried about the adjustments of his wife and son then. He was glad that “my wife and I are willing.” As time passed, since his youngest son had grown up and also gone back home to continue his study, he and his wife could live in Hong Kong just like those who were single.

Another demographic factor that NETs mentioned was age. Most of the NET participants were in their 20s or 30s, only two were in their 50s. NETs had diverse opinions regarding the impact of age on their choice of migration or their experiences in a different culture.

For those who were young like Nancy who was in her 20s, age appears to be a critical factor that would affect the likelihood of whether she would take the chance to live and work in a foreign cultural environment or not. She believed, “if you don’t do it when you’re young, then you’ll never get a chance to do it.” She made the choice to migrate when she was young and she found it beneficial that she could relate well to the students.

For Johnny, though he was still in his 20s, after going through the cross cultural experiences in Japan and Hong Kong, he believed age would be quite a decisive factor if he were to consider moving to other culturally different environments again, “I think I’ve got older. I think that’ll become more difficult for you to start again, to begin with no friends, no knowledge, no experience. I went to Japan when I was 21, so it’s easy for me.”

Having made a move to Hong Kong in his late 30s as a married man with a family and young children to take care of, George was of the view that it would be easier to live in a foreign culture either when one was younger or older. He said: “they’re younger people, or they’re older and have grown up children.” His main concern was the family obligation.

In addition, Raymond, who was already in his 50s and had experienced different cultures including Belgium and France before migrating to Hong Kong, believed that age would have an impact also, “I was mature and older than twenty years ago. As one grows older, it’s easier to come back to a familiar environment. You know the expression to teach an old dog the trick? Right, so I don’t want to teach the old dog the trick.” Nevertheless, it should be noted that when he made the decision to move to Hong Kong, he was already in his 40s, much more mature when compared to other NETs. This indicates that NETs have different understanding or definition of being “young” or “old” themselves.

By contrast, Jacky, young and in his early 30s, had lived in many different cultures and was still very open to the possibility of moving to another culturally different environment

in the future. Age was not a factor for him to consider. He said, “All these exciting things we are doing keep me interested to being here. As soon as I get bored, then I’ll leave.”

Research findings on age and adjustment are somewhat ambiguous. Some studies reported that age has no relation with expatriate adjustment (Parker & McEvoy, 1993; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). Other studies reported that younger persons cope better (Church, 1982). These seemingly contradictory results may be influenced by imprecise and variable definitions of ‘young’ and ‘old’ within and across samples, as Ward *et al.* (2001) pointed out and as the findings of this research indicate. It is interesting to note that age did not appear to be a decisive factor for NETs to make a decision to move to a culturally different environment although some may believe so. There may be other factors, such as prior cross-cultural experiences, personality, marital status, job satisfaction, purpose of migration that might have played a more important role in affecting their decisions.

Cultural backgrounds of the NETs would affect the way they perceived the cultural distance (Selmer, 2001a). From the NETs’ comments, it was found that it would be easier to adjust when the perceived cultural distance was smaller.

“In terms of the cultural environment, yea . . . my father is Chinese, so, there’s something you just expect, you just know that it’s just how the people think.” (Donna)

The Chinese heritage of Donna facilitated her adjustment in Hong Kong because she could expect and understand the Chinese way of thinking more accurately. She could thus help explain to her NET friends that when the Chinese nod their heads without giving a solid answer in response to their questions, they meant to be polite and indicated their agreement to the others’ suggestions. Although personally she would try to uphold her straight and direct style whenever possible, she could understand and accept the Chinese subtle way of communication.

There is a principle which holds that societies can be located on a continuum of how close or distant they are with reference to their sociocultural features (Boski, 1990). The greater the cultural gap between individuals, the more difficulties they will experience when

coming into contact (Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Ward and Searle, 1991; Dunbar, 1992; Torbiorn, 1982). However, sometimes adjustment to a seemingly different culture may not be as difficult as one thought.

“It’s not being that hard for me in HK. . . . everything is quite easy, not difficult.”  
(Johnny)

Coming from England, Johnny observed several aspects in daily life that made it easy for English people to adjust in Hong Kong. Firstly, English is commonly used in the city as “People here in HK, almost everyone can speak some English”, he also found easy access to English entertainments such as “you can go and watch English football, English films, you can buy English newspaper”. The “common things” between England and Hong Kong have greatly facilitated his settling down in the new culture. This indicates that although on the surface the cultural distance between the places may be big, such as in the case of Hong Kong and England, it is the perceived cultural distance that will affect the adjustment of the expatriates concerned.

Research generally supports the view that the greater the difference between the host country’s culture or living conditions and the home country’s culture or living conditions, the more difficult the adjustment process is likely to be (Gregersen and Black, 1990; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Black & Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001a). The sharing of the NETs indicated that although on the surface, the cultural differences between Hong Kong and the western countries may be big, there are some aspects between the cultures that would help narrow the gap, enabling the NETs to perceive some similarities that would facilitate their adjustments.

Moreover, cultural distance may also be beneficial to cross-cultural adjustment in some cases. Coming from a less developed country also facilitated Donna’s adjustment to Hong Kong, a more developed city. “Yea, it’s very different. . . . but coming from a developing nation, and coming to an international and more developed country like Hong Kong.” It is because “things are a lot easier, more convenient.” In Trinidad, she had to live with what they had, she could not get everything she wanted with so much ease, but in Hong Kong,



there were many more products, facilities and services that could help people acquire different things quickly with much ease.

The finding supports research results that social, political and economic characteristics of the society of settlement may also affect cross cultural adjustment. It was found that it was generally easier for expatriates to settle in more developed countries (Guskin, 1966; Korn-Ferry International, 1981; Yoshida *et al.*, 1997). The interaction between the characteristics of the individual in transition, the acculturating group, the culture of origin, and the culture of settlement would affect the adjustment process should be noted (Ward *et al.*, 1999).

#### *Culture Related Experiences, Skills and Knowledge*

Researchers (Ruben & Kealey, 1979) also highlighted the importance of skills and knowledge in the success of cross-cultural experiences. Culture-specific knowledge and skills provide the foundation for effective intercultural interactions and facilitate psychological adaptation to new sociocultural environments (Scott and Scott, 1991; Ward *et al.*, 2001).

One way to acquire knowledge and skills is through prior experience. Research reported positive relationships between previous international experience and adjustment (Klinerberg and Hull, 1979, Parker and McEvoy, 1993; Selmer, 2001b). Sharing of the NETs provided some support to the finding also.

“I’m used to living in foreign countries now, after Japan and Australia. It’s not being that hard for me in HK.” (Johnny)

“I’ve lived in Japan, and Africa. . . . I’ve done a lot of traveling, I’ve experienced a lot of different cultures, very difficult to have culture shock for me.” (Jacky)

Johnny had been to Japan and Australia before coming to teach in Hong Kong while Jacky had studied and lived in various cultures and countries, including Japan and Africa. They believed these international exposures have facilitated their cross-cultural adjustments as they would be more prepared, open and tolerant to the cultural differences and hence less

“shocked”. As Agar (2000) and McLuhan and Fiore (1968) mentioned above, globalization has altered the relationships and nature of cross-cultural contacts. Sojourners with overseas experiences would find their horizons broadened and may be able to discern both the differences and similarities between the various cultures.

The findings supported the results of previous studies that strangers’ preparedness for change would promote their adaptive potential during the initial period of adjustment (Kim, 1988). However, it is also important that information brought about realistic expectations for NETs about the new environment to facilitate their adjustments. Ting-Toomey (1999) believed it is important that sojourners understand the peaks and valleys and positive and negative shifts they might experience in an unfamiliar cultural environment. Tsang (2001) suggested that individuals should adjust their behaviours according to the reality so as to facilitate adjustment. Otherwise, inaccurate expectations would cause unexpected stress which in turn would bring about negative consequences (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Comments from participants in this study provided some support for these findings.

Johnny had visited Hong Kong before, “I’ve come here before on holiday. And I knew how busy it was, and I knew the geography, things like that. But I didn’t know about working here. I guess I expected the situation to be different from what it is.” To him, it was surprising that students’ English standards could be so low, his impression was “people in Hong Kong, almost everyone can speak some English”. As a tourist, he interacted with the staff in the tourism business such as airport and hotel staff who could communicate well in English, he traveled mainly to tourist spots where people did business in English with westerners as well. There was no chance for him to interact with students in his workplace at all.

Nancy visited Hong Kong several times for holidays with her husband-to-be before migrating to this place, “before I came, I came on holidays three times before, so I kind of knew how HK was like before, but I didn’t realize that working here is so demanding.” There was no way for her to understand the work life of the Hong Kong people as a tourist.

Having accurate knowledge of the new cultural environment or prior cross-cultural experiences facilitated the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs. However, there were still many things they had to learn by personally getting into the situation. For example, Daniel said “most things you have to learn by getting into the situation.” If prior-knowledge is superficial or inaccurate, surprises would still occur when the NETs started living in the new environment.

Nevertheless, research shows that knowledge is still important for sojourners as it increases the predictability of the new environment and hence helps them reduce uncertainty (Tsang, 2001). Information such as the local language and nonverbal codes of behaviour would make them more aware of what strangers should know when they entered into a new environment (Gudykunst, 2003) and facilitate their psychological adjustment to the new sociocultural environment (Ward *et al.*, 2001). Some of the comments received from the NETs show that there would be more difficulties in adjustment if sojourners lacked knowledge of the new cultural environment.

Having no knowledge of Hong Kong, Machi came here mainly due to friends’ recommendation while he was teaching in Japan. It was very hard for him to get settled down,

“I had a very hard time when I first came. I had a lot of trouble integrating into the school, and I felt I was blind, I didn’t know what’s going on.”

Having specific knowledge about the cultural environment and relevant skills and the place definitely helped NETs feel happier as these made them feel more secure and enabled them to acquire a sense of competence in taking care of themselves and making personal arrangements in their daily living.

NETs were mostly very pleased with their life after mastering the teaching skills.

“I have established myself in job, I love the kids. Everything is going perfectly, perfectly (smile broadly). (Machi)

“I love teaching, I love the children. . . . Sometimes I feel very exhausted, but now I’m in the second year of my teaching, I’ve learnt how to deal with them, how to understand them.” (Nancy)

“Here in HK, it’s much more professional. I’ve learned a lot. . . . In the beginning, it’s more frustrating. . . . Now I’m very happy with the outcome.” (Jacky)

The NETs mostly learnt from the jobs directly. They realized and accepted that the students were of “low English abilities” and adjusted their expectation and pace of teaching accordingly. They learnt to deal with students lacking motivation by trying sundry methods such as adopting the more effective “local way of punishment”, and they had tried every way to object to the “textbook focused” approach of teaching and developed more interactive initiatives such as reading schemes, singing and drama contests to inspire and encourage the students. For example, Jacky was proud that he had received high commendations from his colleagues and the Education Bureau for his initiatives and success in enhancing the English standards of the entire school.

NETs confessed that they could not master the local language fluently but realized it was not important to acquire the local language for survival in Hong Kong.

“One inconvenience is I don’t read Chinese.” (Trudy)

“I can just speak a few words of Cantonese. . . . Here, most of the people can speak a little bit English, so it’s OK.” (Jacky)

“Everybody is trying to teach me. . . . I’m scared of Cantonese!” (Machi)

They found the local language difficult to pronounce and learn and they did not know the Chinese characters. Fluency in host countries’ foreign languages was expected to contribute to higher levels of interaction adjustment because people with efficient host-country language will have more opportunities to gain information about the novel situation, and according to stress management theory, this will reduce the uncertainty (Brett, 1980). However, although the NETs found it inconvenient that they did not understand the local language, they all realized they could survive on English alone as “Hong Kong is bilingual, nearly everything is written in English and Chinese”. Hence, this may both be a cause or result that impedes their language learning. As literature found, it

may imply the need to consider the language similarity (Ward *et al.*, 1999; Caligiuri, 2001) and the host country nationals' foreign language skills, specifically the ability to speak the language spoken by the sojourners.

While mastering the local language was not an important factor that affected their adjustment, some NETs perceived advantages in learning the local language.

“I guess if I learn more Chinese, my life will be even better.”(Trudy)

“You can enjoy life in HK without Cantonese, but if you can learn Cantonese, you can enjoy a lot more, especially in my job. My students would think you care about our language, you care about us. . . . I would imagine that many NETs feel isolated here, if they've learnt the language, that'll help.” (Johnny)

“If you choose to learn some Cantonese, it would be great, but if you don't, you can manage in HK. . . . But I think it's a bit of a waste to live in Hong Kong and not to learn Cantonese.” (Donna)

They perceived that being able to master the local language could enrich their lives. Some considered that one “should not waste the chance of learning a new language” while living abroad. They might also “understand the students better” through the local language and “gave them more concerns and support”. Learning the local language would also “help them integrate more with the local community” and made them feel less “isolated”. These perceptions motivated the NETs to make efforts to learn the language despite the difficulties and slow progress.

Many NETs also made a lot of effort to learn the city. Nancy knew where and how to go to different places for assorted purposes. This has made her feel more relaxed and secure, “The first year was most difficult because I didn't know how to get around. . . . But now, it's getting better. Maybe I'm getting more adapted to the culture here.” She also knew some Chinese, learnt the price of commodities and felt more confident when going out shopping.

Likewise, Trudy acquired a sense of competence when she got some knowledge of where and how to travel around the city and the local language. She could even be the travel

guide to her family or friends when they visited, “it’s that you’re able to show them something, able to share your knowledge, you know where you can go to enjoy your lives, so these made me happy – being able to do it.”

Some research found that knowledge is more important to adjustment than experiences. Researchers found knowledge of the host culture in the predeparture stage is positively related to general adjustment (Black, 1988; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002a). According to some studies, training may be considered important to cross-cultural adjustment (Desphande and Viswesvaran, 1992; Weaver, 1993). Training is not only the instrument to gain knowledge of the host environment, but it can also help to form accurate expatriate expectations and results in greater satisfaction and adjustment (Porter & Steers, 1973; Caligiuri, 2001).

Training is a way through which cross-cultural knowledge can be acquired. As regards cross-cultural training, the NETs had either received none or had only attended the induction workshops organized by the Education Bureau. The effect of such training on their experiences in Hong Kong was not too strong, although some did find the contents and materials helpful. Most NETs commented that the duration of the workshops was too brief as the workshops usually lasted for just a few days, and might not be held immediately after the NETs arrived in Hong Kong, those who came late due to various reasons could only attend the workshops at different points of time after they have settled down in Hong Kong and the effectiveness of the workshops to them would be largely diminished.

Some NETs were positive about the workshops.

“The Education Bureau, they sent us a folder of materials in Australia before I came. That’s very helpful.” (Daniel)

“For me it’s funny to have induction course, I’ve been living for almost four years. But I was so happy I joined them. I met many nice people. . . . Overall I must say it’s very good.” (Trudy)

They enjoyed the “enlightening speech of good speakers”, they found the discussions with speakers and fellow NETs inspiring, they also made efforts to read the information package and found the tips on “step-by-step list of things” practical and helpful. They got some ideas of what to expect of the students like problems of “Chinglish” and “lack of motivation”.

However, for most of other NETs, the induction programme and the contents were rather shallow and not of much help mainly and the timing was inappropriate.

“It lasted for one day only, so that’s pretty much the only introduction, I would not really call that a cultural programme.” (Donna)

“No, extremely disappointed. . . . I’ve been here 6 months already, everything they told me I’ve already done like how to set up a bank account, all these kinds of things. I needed it when I first got here. I don’t need it now.” (Machi)

“I came in March, I didn’t have an induction programme. . . . I didn’t meet other NETs for, maybe months. I think, should have been something for new NETs. . . . Then I went to the induction programme 6 months later I joined the school. Was it helpful? No because I’ve been here for 6 months.” (Johnny)

They mostly complained about the short duration of the workshop and the timing it was scheduled. They expected the contents to be more substantial. They wanted the workshop immediately when they arrived, but they only had the chance to attend when they had settled down for some time, but by then they had experienced and handled many of the barriers and problems at work. They also expected to interact with other NETs for support at the beginning, but they had already met with other NETs at schools or social avenues by the time the induction workshop was organized. Due to these reasons, most NETs perceived the induction workshop to be ineffective.

The findings supported research observation that very often little preparation was offered to expatriates for daily adjustments. Training programs were typically limited to less than or equal to one week, less than one-third of which was focused on language and culture (Runzheimer, 1984; Mukuda, 2001). Living skills, such as setting up bank accounts, retaining health care services, and the like, were covered to a lesser extent. Participants

adopted a trial-and-error learning approach to adjust to the systems and structures of the new environment. The process is time consuming, taxing and frustrating.

### *Support from Others*

Studies (Adelman, 1988; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998) found that close ties such as having close friends could provide important informational support functions to help them solve daily problems in the early adjustment of sojourners. Besides personal factors, having culture specific knowledge and skills and others' support were also found to be important for successful cross-cultural adjustments, be it from family members, relatives, colleagues or friends. All the NETs agreed that it was important to have support from the others, especially during the initial period of time when they first arrived in Hong Kong. However, not all of them were able to engage the support of others in times of need.

Family support was very important for NETs for emotional reasons such as getting help to overcome stress and loneliness in a different cultural environment. Some were lucky to have their family stay with them in Hong Kong, others would have to make effort to stay in touch with their family members afar by all means.

“It was difficult. . . . then my husband joining me, when he came, things totally changed; my view of Hong Kong changed, when your relatives came and visited, they made you happy.” (Trudy)

“When I first came here, I came on my own with my friend, my wife and my two children stayed in Australia for four months, which was very hard for me. . . . when my family came over, we stayed there for two years. . . . I'm better than most people because I have my family here.” (Daniel)

“I will call my parents in Australia. . . . We also have MSN. They visit me as well. I usually go back once a year, back to Australia. (Nancy)

Most of the NETs did not have family members in Hong Kong, and they all agreed that having support of friends and colleagues was very important. Friends could provide emotional and practical assistance to the NETs, particularly when they first arrived in



Hong Kong. However, not all of them could establish an extensive network of friends in an alien culture, but some managed to talk with “virtual friends” online.

“I lived in Sai Kung for the first nine months, beautiful place, but all of my friends live in Central, so that was bit of a problem for me, so I moved into Central just before summer vacation.” (Machi)

Friends were so important that Machi preferred to move his place of residence to stay close to them because “when that happened, my enjoyments increased tenfold.” Friendship brought him much joy.

Having friends could provide vital emotional support, “having other western teaching friends to communicate with, talk to, complain with, socialize with, definitely help, because we have the same mind, same training, same background, same culture, same perceptions,” said Raymond.

Friends could also provide instrumental support in time of need. “At my work, my school and my colleagues are really nice. I am lucky in my school, I got treated very nicely,” said Nancy. Her colleagues supported her in teaching, relieved her for rest when she felt too exhausted. They also provided her much needed information on daily living things such as where to buy needles and threads and where to shop for daily necessities.

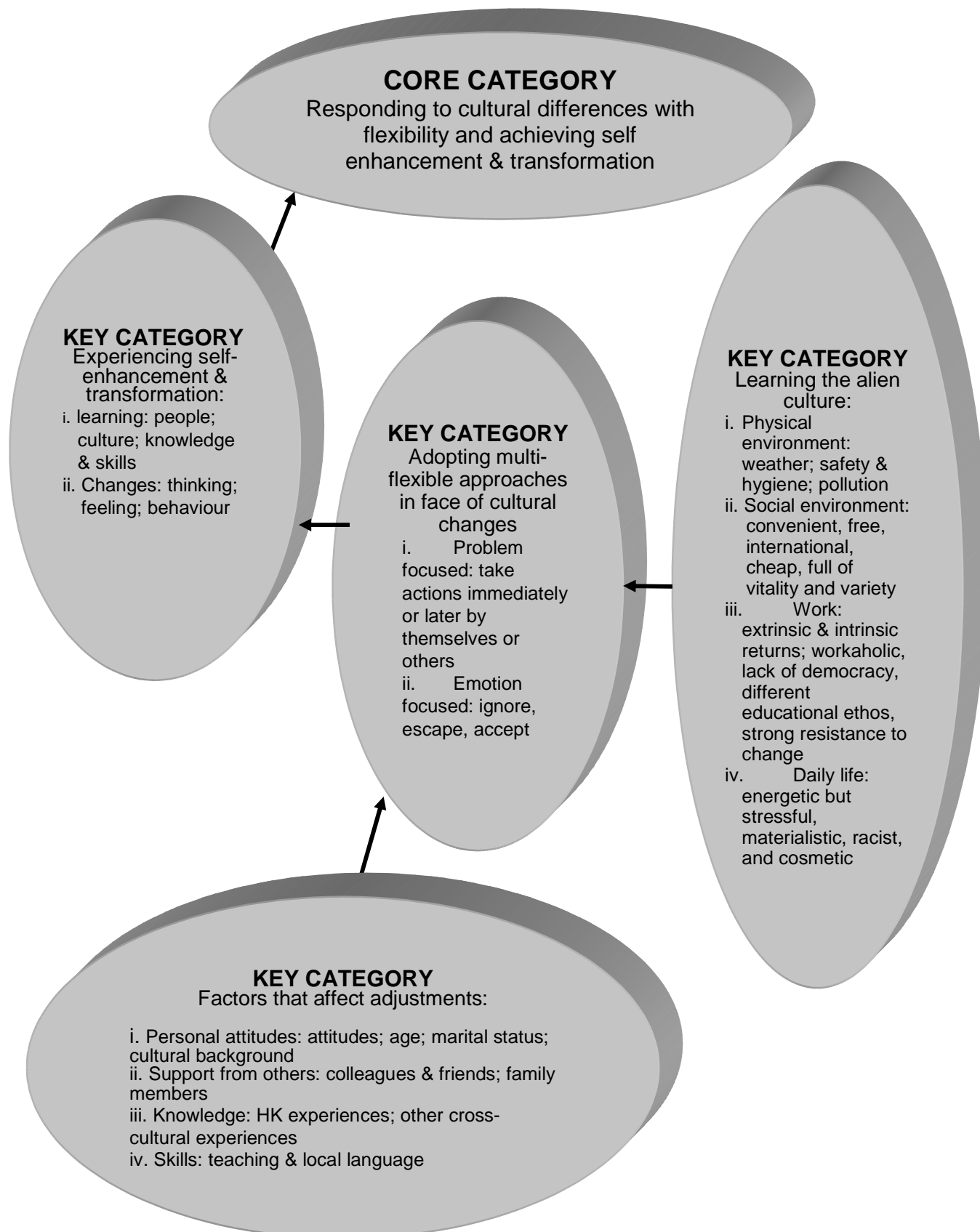
Constrained by family obligations, George could not spend time on networking after work, but he worked out a way to establish virtual friendship online and obtained information and instrumental support, “I found a forum called PNET forum. . . . There is the Native English Teachers Association. Through their website I found other NET forums, so in the forums, the NETs talk about their problems they are having. . . which is very helpful.” They could share ideas, experiences and suggestions on work items such as how to motivate students to organize English dramas.

Having the support of family, friends, local colleagues and friends of similar cultural backgrounds are no doubt positive factors that facilitate the cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs in a culturally different environment.

The findings are consistent with research studies that the presence of social support is negatively correlated with the emergence of psychiatric symptomatology in immigrants (Lin *et al.*, 1979; Biegel *et al.*, 1980); its absence is associated with the increased probability of physical and mental illness during cross-cultural sojourns (Hammer, 1987).

The findings of the study can be summarized in Figure 4.2 (the size of each shape carries no implications for the importance of the key category).

Figure 4.2: A model of Native-Speaking English Teachers responding to cultural differences



#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, data from the participants were analyzed. The main objective of this research is to learn the NETs' cross-cultural adjustment experiences in Hong Kong and how they responded to the culturally different environment. Attempts were made to identify the key categories behind the data through comparisons of the main themes that emerged in the data analysis. The core category identified from the data is *responding to cultural changes with flexibility and achieving self enhancement and transformation*, and this embraced the key categories and the range of data to explain the cross-cultural experiences of the NETs in Hong Kong and the ways in which they responded to the culturally different environment.

Although many commonalities were found, the data also show that the stories and outcomes of cultural contact for the NETs varied, experiences for some of the sojourners being much more positive than for others. These differences in their perceptions, experiences and responses could be explained by a number of factors as mentioned above. As indicated in the core category, flexibility is a key that underscores the cross-cultural experiences of all the NETs.

The findings also point to the need for customized training with well thought out contents catering to differences in individuals. Further, the characteristics of their destinations should be arranged for the NETs (or expatriates in general) to enable them to be well prepared for cross-cultural journeys. No two persons will have identical experiences, even if they are setting for the same cultural destination. Their personal characteristics such as skin colour, prior experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests and expectations may vary greatly. These would elicit very different reactions from the host nationals in the new cultural environment and hence result in very different experiences and lead to varying responses.

The data also support the hypothesis advanced in chapter one, that the effectiveness of the NET scheme is affected by the extent to which issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed sufficiently. Addressing the research questions in general terms, as set out at the start of chapter three, the data analysis here suggests that the policies for NETs in Hong

Kong may not be working as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention as issues in the cross-cultural adjustment of the sojourners has been insufficiently addressed, that a range of problems in cross-cultural adjustment are experienced by the sojourners, that the host cultures are insufficiently prepared to accommodate the sojourners, that culture shock and its significance is under-estimated in the project, and that urgent attention to these matters may be instrumental in reducing further the significant attrition rates found.

Here the data suggest that sojourners have a lot to learn, and in a very short time, about similarities and differences between their own and the host cultures, and that the host culture may be very alien to them. The data also identify a considerable range of factors that affect the processes and outcomes of cross-cultural contacts, indeed the data indicate the importance of addressing the ongoing *processes* of cross-cultural adjustment, not only the single event or single induction programmes upon arrival in Hong Kong. The data argue for the need for flexibility not only in the sojourners, but in the host cultures themselves (not least in the schools), so that self-esteem and responsiveness to the host culture can be developed over time.

The next chapter reviews the answers to the research questions and whether the findings agree with existing literature on cross-cultural contacts.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will examine the findings of the research and indicate how well they fit with the literature. Discussions will focus on where the findings agree or disagree with the literature, where they extend and refine the literature, where they make the theory clear and where they add to and render more nuanced the literature suggests. This chapter will also speculate on the reasons for the responses received in the interviews.

#### **5.2 CONCEPTUALIZING CULTURE**

As discussed in Chapter 2, culture is a multi-dimensional concept, it is the expression of groups of people, not one person. It comprises, transmits and reinforces central ideas, values and ideals of the group. However, with the wide spread of globalization and multiculturalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, traditional characterizations of culture have been challenged as the combined population of most countries has become so fluid. Bennett's (1993) phenomenological view of intercultural sensitivity and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) view of the hidden assumptions that underline cultural value dilemmas advocate that culture acts as a perceptual framework used to make sense of the world and, in turn, informs choices about particular behavior. This view of culture seems to fit well with the experiences reported by those who face intercultural learning challenges, as many sojourners in this research talked of their experiences in terms of cultural difference or 'patterns of difference' as observed by Shaules (2007).

It can be seen that the potential for difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment may be immense here, as English speaking countries differ from countries in which English is not the first language, and that, perhaps there are significant differences between East and West here. Hence most NETs, as westerners coming to Hong Kong, an oriental culture, may experience very significant differences in terms of what is considered acceptable and not acceptable, usual and unusual. Even though it may be debatable whether it is possible

to classify countries according to the dimensions indicated by Hofstede (1980), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), the NET informants in this study did accept and find it helpful to use these orienting concepts to indicate cross-cultural differences. At issue here is the matter that cross-cultural adjustment needs to take account of very different sets of values and definitions of what is and is not accepted and acceptable behavior.

### 5.3 CROSS-CULTURAL THEORIES

The literature review identified various facets of adjustment: work, general and interaction (Black & Stephen, 1989, Black *et al.*, 1992). *Work adjustment* refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort regarding the job tasks in the foreign assignment. *General adjustment* refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort regarding non-work factors, such as food, and living conditions associated with the foreign national culture. *Interaction adjustment* refers to the expatriate's psychological comfort in interacting with host country nationals.

In this research, NETs mainly talked about adjustment at work and their daily lives. Some of them were clearly conscious that these two were very different aspects in their cross-cultural experiences. Consistent with literature findings, the NETs affirmed that there are various aspects in cross-cultural adjustment, for example:

“Daily life and working, ah, these are two very different aspects.” (Daniel)

“I guess we should separate working and daily living.” (Donna)

To them, work experience was naturally acquired in the schools they taught. Although their individual feelings towards their work lives varied as reported in chapter four, they did share some common observations about working in Hong Kong. For example, they reported that local teachers were very hard working and stressed, there was no democracy in the workplace as the principal was the sole power figure in the school, the students' standards of English were generally low, and the schools usually placed much emphasis on the textbooks and examinations. These were almost the total antithesis of the work

culture in the schools where they had taught back home. Hence, nearly all of them commented that it took time for them to learn and adjust to the local way of working and teaching in Hong Kong. In the end, while the majority of them were able to overcome the barriers and difficulties and enjoyed the fruit of their efforts and attained a sense of satisfaction from their work, one of them felt that he survived by initiating as little changes or deviation as possible, while another found his work ‘a daily irritation.’

By ‘daily life’, the NETs refer to factors like food, clothing, physical and social environments. All of them admitted that they enjoyed their daily lives in Hong Kong. Factors they appreciated include ‘variety in food, entertainment’, ‘convenience’ brought by the ‘compact neighbourhood’, ‘transportation efficiency’, ‘freedom to travel’ to other Asian regions, low cost of living, excitement of meeting friends of exotic and local ethnic origin. Some studies identified these dimensions as psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment (Aycan, 1997) in addition to work adjustment.

The findings also support the studies which identified stressors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and role novelty to be negatively related to work adjustment in an international transfer, but these were not expected to influence interaction and general adjustment (c.f. Black *et al.*, 1992).

The literature review presented many theories explaining the cross-cultural adjustment phenomenon, including process theories, personality based theories, stress-coping theories and interactive theories (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985).

In process theories, the characterizations of adaptation stages have been described in “curves” that depicts the patterns of adaptive change over time. The basic notion in process models is the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills, no matter whether the patterns of change are U-curve, linear or other curve patterns (Lysgaard, 1955; Adler, 1975). One prominent theory was proposed by Oberg (1960) who argued that there are four main stages involved in process theories of cross-cultural adjustment: the honeymoon stage; the hostility stage (frustration, anxiety, and hostility toward the host country); beginning adaptation; and thorough adjustment. In this research, the findings show that the patterns of their cross-cultural adjustments varied considerably. Some may follow a U-



curve; others may be a rising line starting from a low end to a high point; some may be just a horizontal line starting from a high end and remaining rather stable thereafter. Johnny and Donna were the only two who viewed their experiences as following the U-shaped pattern; others did not think so. It turned out that both of them had read about the theories before and their perspectives might have been influenced by their knowledge of cross-cultural adjustments. The other NETs expressed very different perceptions. Daniel found his 'life happy and the people welcoming from the beginning'. Machi and Trudy experienced an awful start when their spirits and hearts sank to the bottom and gradually lifted so that they were finally able to feel happy and grateful in their lives.

Some researchers, viewing cross-cultural experiences as progressing in stages, tended to view these experiences as a learning experience for intercultural sojourners despite the anxiety or pain to be experienced during the adaptation process (Kao, 1975; Heath, 1977; Adler, 1987; Bennett, 1993; Wrightsman, 1999). Kim (1988, 2001) developed a theory of stress-adaptation growth dynamic to illustrate the process of intercultural transformation, in which the interdependence of stress, adaptation, and the internal transformation was highlighted. The findings in this thesis were supportive of Kim's theory, as the NETs viewed the experiences as a learning and growing opportunity during which they understood more about themselves as well the new culture (such as Trudy, Donna and Nancy). They felt stress when they did not understand the way, the price, the transportation, the language etc. They found it painful to go through the learning process, such as having to bear with the staring of the locals and being cheated or treated rudely by the merchants, and these negative experiences prompted them to put efforts to learn the places, some of the language, and, in the case of one of the respondents, how to dress and speak to avoid being mistaken as a Philippina maid. 'Being able to do it' (Trudy), as they acquired the sense of competence, they felt much adapted and at ease. Finally they realized themselves 'coming out a different person' (Nancy).

This research found that, for NETs, one of the commonest problems they encountered in Hong Kong was multi-level marginalization, i.e. the EDB did not give adequate preparation to the NETs, NETs were put out in remote schools, and when they arrived in the schools the resident staff marginalized them. They were treated as outsiders rather than

as partners, i.e. the host culture (Hong Kong, community, schools, departments) seemed reluctant to change itself and expected the NETs to be the only parties to change.

In the literature, there is an overwhelming emphasis on expatriate's individual characteristics. The basic assumption is that identifying the attitudes, traits, and skills that predict overseas success would improve selection procedures and training practices (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985). Personality-based determinants related to a person's sociability and openness have received the most attention in relation to adjustment (e.g., Stenning, 1979; Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Black, 1990; Caligiuri, 2000).

Sharing of the NETs lent additional support to the assumption. A majority of the NETs felt very satisfied with their work and daily lives. They pointed out that 'attitude' was very important. They described themselves as 'having the right attitude', and that it was important to 'be open' 'be flexible', 'try to learn', 'go out and make friends.' Raymond was the only one who was adamant that 'NETs are not here to adapt', and he found his working life 'a daily irritation'; however, in his daily life, he admitted that he had accepted the customs and behavior of the locals, for example, people would cut the queue, people would litter, he would just 'ignore' all these aspects that he found disgusting.

The Five Factor Model (i.e. Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness) of Personality (the 'Big Five') has also been used to organize the potential predictors of expatriate job success (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997). The model has been criticized for being too western, with additional factors in the Chinese personality that have been found that were not present in the western factors (Bond, 1991; Goldberg, 1992; Yik and Bond, 1993; Cheung *et al.*, 1996; McCrae and Costa, 1996; Cheung *et al.*, 2001; Liu *et al.*, 2007). Lui *et al.* (2007) found that Chinese were less positive of themselves than Americans and that Chinese placed more emphasis on politeness than Americans, whilst Bond (1991) reported that in Chinese societies face management is very important (face saving, face giving, face gaining, face keeping). In this research, NETs repeatedly mentioned that the Chinese culture was very different from their home cultures in this aspect.

"Chinese are very different, they never say yes, they never say no directly." (Nancy)

“Chinese are very subtle, this is new to me, I have to learn.” (Daniel)

“Hong Kong people are very cosmetic...I was surprised to realize that my colleagues would never say no to their bosses, but after their bosses have left, they would express their anger when they thought nobody was around.” (Donna)

The significance of personality studies in the context of this thesis is to suggest that the constituent elements, their balance and what are valued, may vary from culture to culture. Hence there is a possibility of difference, dissonance, frustration and stress stemming from the clash of different personalities, located within different cultural roots.

Studies also indicated that Leader-member Exchange (LMX) as a positive input to expatriate's work adjustment (Kraimer *et al.*, 2001) and that high quality LMX relationships may result in higher levels of support and guidance from supervisors, higher levels of subordinate satisfaction and performance, and better quality of assignment performance (Varma and Stroh, 2001). Most of the NETs mentioned about having acquiring great satisfaction from work (such as Nancy, Machi, Jacky, Donna) affirmed the importance of being able to establish a supportive relationship with their supervisors.

#### **5.4 OUTCOMES OF CROSS-CULTURAL CONTACT: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

The primary questions of this study are: what are the adjustment experiences of the Native-speaking English teachers in an Asian city (Hong Kong), and how do they respond to the changes in a new cultural environment?

A major difference expatriates may find lies in the domain of general behavior expectations, the unwritten rules of how to act so as not to appear different. Weaver (1993) stated that the most common symptom of culture shock is a lack of control or sense of helplessness due to the sojourners' lack of knowledge of how to act or behave in the new environment; unconscious reactions to the situation may control sojourners unless they understand what is happening to them psychologically.

As before, the preceding discussion underlines the significance of the NETs having accurate perceptions of the situations so that their cross-cultural adjustment is informed and sensitive, and so that they are aware of how to increase empathic behaviour in the new situation. They must be prepared to be regarded as different, as, indeed they are. However, the notion of difference extends in two directions: the host culture regards the sojourner as different and the sojourner regards the host culture as different, and this may lead to difficulties in cross-cultural adjustment.

The NETs found a lot of differences between Hong Kong and their home countries, from their physical appearances, the physical and social environment, the people, the work and to the culture. They noticed that they looked and sounded different. The locals treated them negatively or positively, mainly depending on their skin colour and gender. Female white expatriates would be treated with more respect ostensibly, for example, the locals would make way for them to pass down the street, they would, however, be cheated by the locals who thought that they did not understand Chinese and would charge them higher prices for goods or services. Male white expatriates would feel rejected by the locals as the people often refused to sit next to them on public transport. Both male and female expatriates found themselves to be stared a lot by the locals, which made them feel uneasy. Female non-white expatriates would be taken as Philippino maids and hence would be loathed and treated rudely by the locals. As Paige (1983) pointed out, physically difference will pose great psychological stress to sojourners in a new cultural environment.

The NETs also noticed differences in the physical environment. Weaver (1993) viewed that changing physical environments will cause stress for sojourners (Weaver, 1993). Barna's research (1983) on stress suggested that change of physical environments, in and of itself, produces much of the stress that may be attributed to culture shock. However, NETs indicated that they liked the mild winter, the safety and good hygiene. They enjoyed exploring the different parts of the city and experiencing the novelty of the environment. On the other hand, they disliked the hot humid summer and found the air and noise pollution worsening.

They were very impressed by the social environment of Hong Kong. They found the local transportation very efficient and convenient, which gave them the freedom to travel and

enabled them to be connected with other parts of the world. They enjoyed the wide selection of assorted types of food and entertainments. They found the cost of living in Hong Kong to be low. They appreciated the internationalism of the city and found Hong Kong exciting and energetic.

However, though they perceived Hong Kong people to be energetic, they also found people to be impolite, busy, rushing, and always stressed. They felt that while Hong Kong people liked to show off their affluence, they would not express their feelings directly. They were very puzzled by this great cultural difference. To them, the Hong Kong people were “cosmetic” and the culture was “subtle”. This echoed the comments made above, that Chinese placed more emphasis on politeness than Americans (Liu *et al.*, 2007) and that in Chinese societies face management is very important (Bond, 1991).

Concerning their work, NETs reported that there were many job opportunities for expatriate teaching professionals in Hong Kong, and that they gained both external and internal rewards from their work in terms of monetary return and job satisfaction. However, they found the Hong Kong educational system and disciplinary methods rather different from those of the western countries, they disapproved of the textbook focused approach, and some did not appreciate the ‘workaholic’ culture and a lack of democracy in the workplace.

As mentioned above, personality differences and dissonances between those in the sojourner/the sojourner’s home country and the host culture may influence the ease with which the sojourner makes cross-cultural adjustments. Although, on the surface, it appears that many practices were different in Hong Kong, some did appreciate some cultural similarities between Hong Kong and western countries, mainly, they said, due to the influence and legacy of the British rule in Hong Kong. English speaking expatriates, especially those coming from England, found it easy to communicate in English and they had easy access to western entertainments like English newspapers, English football, and English films. Some NETs perceived similarities between eastern and western cultures in aspects such as food, language and human nature. They found that some words in the languages sounded similar and may have shared common word roots. The ways in which

some of the food was prepared also appeared similar. Finally, they found the basic nature of people alike all around the world.

## **5.5 CULTURE SHOCK**

Researchers highlighted the point that cross-cultural contact is a difficult and stressful life experience (e.g. Ward, 1996; Bochner, 2002). When we are confronted with cultural differences, we tend to view people from other cultures as strangers (Shack, 1979). Strangers may not understand the social world inhabited by members of the group with whom they come into contact, and thus they may have many problems and even experience crises unfathomable to the host nationals (Schuetz, 1944; Herman and Schield, 1960; Parrillo, 1980). Individuals differ greatly in the degree to which culture shock affects them and some could not live in foreign countries (Oberg, 1960; Taft, 1977).

One of the potentially significant finding of this study is that not all NETs had experienced culture shock to any observable extent in a culturally different environment. Not all NETs considered themselves to have experienced culture shock symptoms. While some recalled having experienced “loneliness”, “sadness”, “homesickness”, others thought their experiences were overall positive throughout their stay in Hong Kong, some even claimed they had no culture shock at all.

However, it should be pointed out that the comments of the NETs were gathered some time after they had settled down in Hong Kong for some time. Their memories may have failed them, or their recollections may be an overall summary of their impressions of their cross-cultural experiences in Hong Kong so far. Except Johnny and Donna, who had read about stages theories of cross-cultural adjustment, others may not be so conscious of the process of their cross-cultural adjustment. As mentioned, attempts to predict the culture shock phenomenon have been elusive. Maybe only when the culture shock symptoms were so prominent and poignant would they would be etched deeply in the memories of the cross-cultural sojourners. Moreover, it should also be noted that nowadays globalization is revolutionizing intercultural relationships, communication technology is changing the cross-cultural experiences of people (McLuhan, 1968) and the world has become a new “transcultural community” (Agar, 2000). Hence, for the frequent travelers

who have wide international experiences like Jacky and Johnny, the impact of culture shock was largely diminished.

However, it could be that culture shock can be experienced separately in the different facets of the adjustments, i.e. work, general and interaction adjustment. While most NETs described their experiences as enjoyable, exciting and wonderful, or even perfect, regardless of the initial difficulties or on-going problems they may have encountered, they considered the work life much more difficult, due to the reasons mentioned above. One of the main conflicts might arise from the fact that NETs have been described as “change agents” who shall “provide an authentic environment for children to learn English, develop children's interest in learning the language, help local teachers develop innovative learning and teaching methods and materials, and disseminate good practices.” (Gibb, 2003d). They would be introduced to new teaching and learning methods at the induction programs. Many NET participants were therefore taken aback when they encountered strong resistance to change in their schools:

“Because like learning things from the EDB, they wanted to change the school system, going back from the EDB workshops, I said they should try that, they were reluctant to try, initially there was some friction.” (Jacky)

“But the climate of the school is such that when teachers coming in, they want to do things differently, they aren't supported by the school board. They support the older teachers, we value our older teachers, experienced teachers, so don't make trouble. If you want to make changes, you have to do it little by little.” (George)

“No matter what the government and the EDB pretend to say and do, deep down, they're not. They say they are changing, they produce documents to say they're changing. They put in new agencies of changes. . . . They may have different names, but it's the same thing. . . . Unfortunately the schools I've been in, have not used me the NET as the change agent.” (Raymond)

NETs describe the experience as “negative”, “total, total shock”. They find the schools “reluctant”, “pretentious” and “unsupportive” towards the changes they initiated. The

NETs were regarded as outsiders who make trouble; hence friction and frustration resulted. While many might not consider themselves to have experienced culture shock in the general or interaction facets of adjustment, they had been shocked by the culture in the workplace.

Change is unavoidable in any organizations that strive to stay competitive in today's highly complex world. Literature reveals that attempt to convert the whole organization to an acceptance of change is difficult, and change agents often have to cope with the tactical political manoeuvring of other powerful stakeholders resistant to change (Daft, 1999; Nutt, 1986). One major problem of overcoming resistance may be the lack of power to undertake such activity (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). This is the main frustration of the NETs as often they found themselves not supported by the schools in terms of initiating changes. Moreover, members of a new-venture group, such as the NETs in this research, may be surprised when existing employees do not support or approve of changes out of various reasons like self-interest, lack of understanding and trust, or uncertainty (Daft, 1999). Daft pointed out that the visible support of top management can help to overcome resistance to change, and successful structural change can be accomplished through a top-down approach. NETs found the school principals vested with absolute power in Hong Kong. The appeal of NETs such as George and Machi was to provide training to the school principals and teachers to educate them to embrace necessary changes as well. Assistance and support must be provided to the NETs, among other strategies, to empower them to implement the changes.

## **5.6 RELATIONSHIPS**

From the research findings, it is apparent that to most NETs, work and daily living were two different facets of adjustment. While they perceived their daily living to be comparatively easy to adjust despite some hiccups or negative incidents, adjusting to the work culture in Hong Kong was very different. All of them encountered frustrations and conflicts at work, particularly in the initial period upon arrival, in an extreme case, the working remained a daily irritation to the NET concerned. Adjustment problems occurred much more often in their workplace than in their daily lives in Hong Kong.



According to Bochner (1982), four types of most possible response styles to cross-cultural interaction can be identified: passing, chauvinist, marginal, and mediating (see also Berry's (1992) classification of responses into four categories, similar to Bochner's model: assimilation, separation, integration, marginalization).

Moreover, the results of cultural contact can be very complex. The study found evidence to support the view that the NETs relate to the host country in different modes at different time, mostly adopting a mode of cultural hybridity (Berry, 1992; Martin and Nakayama, 2007). They may assimilate on one occasion, but attempt to keep a distance from the locals on other occasions, they may want economic assimilation through their employment, but marginalization in their social lives. For example, George was a very cooperative colleague, he tried his best to adapt to the workplace culture by making only small and slow changes that were acceptable to the colleagues, but he did not socialize much with his colleagues in his private life after work. Machi also enjoyed exploring Hong Kong very much, he enjoyed visiting local places that are full of exotic smells and observing the local ways of lives. However, he preferred to mingle with non-local friends when he wanted to share or receive social support.

## **5.7 INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

Intercultural communicative competence may be defined as behavior that is appropriate and effective in a given context (Spitzberg, 2000); or as the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication which may include cultural differences unfamiliarity, inter-group posture, and the accompanying experience of stress (Kim: 2000). The components include knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds for belonging to a given social group. (Byram *et al.*, 2001). Sometimes cultural competence is also viewed as an analog to linguistic competence (Keesing, 1974). An understanding of nonverbal behavior is also important to help discern the cues underlying attitudes and values (Hall, 2000).

This study affirms the importance of preparing sojourners to address their own development of cross-cultural competence, and to be supported in this development.

However, it finds that the host culture is normally resistant to change to accommodate the new comers as shown in the resistance to changes in the workplace in the study here. Often expatriates are left to explore and acquire intercultural skills on their own, whether these are verbal or behavioral, and they need to adjust to the new culture with little or no support from their employing institutions.

## **5.8 RESPONSES TO THE NEW CULTURE**

As mentioned, two general types of coping are identified by Folkman & Lazarus (1980). Problem-focused coping aims at doing something to alter the source of the stress, emotion-focus coping aims at managing the emotional distress associated with the situation. Although most stressors elicit both types of coping, they observe that problem-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that something constructive can be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tends to predominate when people feel that the situation must be endured. Coping strategies address both problem identification and emotional factors, and indicate that cross-cultural adjustment operates in both cognitive and affective domains.

NETs employed a mixed range of strategies in coping with the changes, differences and/or barriers. The study supports the literature findings that under situations in which NETs felt themselves in control, they used problem-focused methods, and that if they could not do anything to alter the situation then they tended to rely on emotion-focused methods. There were no significant gender differences in the coping responses, except that females mentioned more about seeking help for affective reasons.

Moreover, in research on expatriates' cross-cultural experiences and coping, it was found that emotion-focused coping such as expatriate refuge and expatriate escapism, whereby expatriates attempt to minimize anxieties by physically or mentally withdrawing from the situation or avoiding the problem, have negative relations to adjustment in one or more facets (Selmer, 1999; 2001). However, in this study, emotion-focused coping such as ignoring the reality, accepting the reality as it is, finding one's escape or having a break from Hong Kong did help the NETs release their pressure belts, obtain a breathing space from the stress, and enabled them to adopt a positive attitude and perception.

It seems that both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping may facilitate cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs, depending on the circumstances in which the coping responses are employed. The particular way of coping itself does not carry a negative or positive implication. It indicated that NETs did appraise the situations and choose the most appropriate ways of responding that were most beneficial to them and/or the others. Tomalin (2009) suggested that there are four phases in the learning cycle: activity, bebrief, conclusion and implementation and stressed that the activity phase is very important. “Intercultural training is first and foremost a knowledge-based topic. . . . it is also a topic that invites reflection and conCsideration of one’s own mindset and one’s own practice”. There must also be reflection, analysis and action” (Alred *at al.*, 2003: 1, 5).

## **5.9 FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT THEIR RESPONSES**

As mentioned above, a variety of factors, such personal, workplace and environmental will affect the responses of expatriates in new cultural environments. In this research, major factors found to be related to NETs’ responses include attitude, age, marital status, personal cultural background, perceived cultural distance, culture-related skills and knowledge.

### **5.9.1 Right attitudes**

Personality based studies advocate that personal traits widely considered to be healthy, such as willingness to communicate, cultural flexibility, positive affectivity, and showing tolerance, etc., were reported to have strong positive effects on three facets of adjustment mentioned earlier (Black, 1990; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001b). In contrast, psychological adjustment problems have been associated with the consequences of authoritarian personality, and decrements in overall satisfaction have been related to the consequences of dogmatic behaviour (Taft and Steinkalk, 1985). NETs’ sharing further support these claims.

The NETs emphasized the importance of adopting the ‘right attitude’ to live and work in a culturally different environment, they meant that one should be ‘open’, ‘positive’,

‘flexible’, ‘able to relax’, ‘ready for change’, ‘willing to learn’, ‘learn to respect and accept the local culture’, and be ‘humorous and laugh’ even under stressful situations.

“The attitude of willing to learn, and willing to try new ideas.” (Daniel)

“when you go to different countries, you’re always learning.” (Jacky)

“I’m quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt. . .” (Nancy)

“be positive. . . . be open to learn more and know more. . . . be willing to learn their culture, and want to share your culture with them. . . .” (Trudy)

“You have to look at it as a humour, something to laugh at, a learning experience, or just something you observe. . . . Be positive, enjoy being here.” (Donna)

The NETs indicated that they “like”, “want” and “are willing”, echoing Feng’s (2009: 88) comment that “to become interculturally competent, it (exposure) has to go with willingness to relate to otherness, skills to mediate between cultures and actions to explore third space”. Indeed, willingness and flexibility to adapt are the keys for the NETs to acquire intercultural competence.

### **5.9.2. Relational support**

Relational skills have been variously operationalized as communication skills, sociability etc., and that they have their strongest effects on general and interaction adjustment (e.g., Gregersen & Black, 1992; Selmer, 1999; 2001; Caligiuri, 2000b). The absence of social support is associated with the increased probability of physical and mental illness during cross-cultural sojourns (Hammer, 1987; Lin *et al.*, 1979; Biegel *et al.*, 1980). In this research, relational skills are reflected in the abilities of the NETs to establish a network of support from family members, relatives, colleagues and friends:

“I have one of the better NET experiences of living in Hong Kong, because I’ve got my 姐姐(aunty) and my cousins here. I’m working in a Christian school, everyone is really nice. I really enjoy it.” (Donna)

“When my husband came, things totally changed with his positive attitude. My view of Hong Kong changed. . . . after that, my brother came to visit me with his family. . .” (Trudy)

“I think in HK you spend most of your life working unfortunately. Really needs to keep a good relationship with your colleagues. If you’re miserable at work, you’ll be miserable at home.” (Nancy)

“I have a core group of friends and I’m really enjoying. Everything is going perfectly, perfectly. . . . My principal is very supportive, understanding, the teachers are really well. I am really lucky.” (Machi)

However, other investigations have pointed to a link between more extensive host national contact and increased psychological distress (Ward and Kennedy, 1992; 1993b; Grove & Torbiorn, 1993) and higher levels of stress, fatigue, loneliness, and a stronger desire to go home (Paige, 1993). Studies found these sojourners do not have the chance to reconfirm their cultural identity (Paige, 1993). In this research, NETs mentioned the importance of having friends of similar cultures as this also helped them to be more understanding of each other’s experience. As Raymond said, “having western teaching friends to communicate with, complain with, socialize with, definitely help, because we have the same mind, same background, same culture, same perceptions”. However, one informant mentioned the disadvantage of being surrounded by friends of a similar culture as they tend to be lavish in their complaints about the problems they have encountered as expatriates in Hong Kong. This NET therefore suggested that one needs to have both local and non-local friends to have a more balanced mix.

Clearly the NETs found friends to be important in providing practical and emotional support. Social support received provides information and extra resources to reduce

uncertainty and hence increase their satisfaction with their lives and work (Black, 1990) and provide them the outlet to release their psychological burden and overcome their feelings of isolation or loneliness. This may indicate that co-national relationships may be both harmful and helpful to expatriate adjustments, probably depending on the nature of individual supporters and the group's dynamics (Ward *et al.*, 2001).

Education, occupation and income have also been considered as influential factors on cross-cultural adjustment. Education is associated with better adjustment and lower levels of stress (Jayasuriya *et al.*, 1992), as education is linked to other resources such as culture-specific knowledge and skills and to socio-economic assets such as higher status occupations and greater income (Ward *et al.*, 2001). NETs admitted they enjoyed the attractive income they could earn as a NET in Hong Kong. They reported that 'the money is attractive', 'NETs have good salary' and can 'save a lot'. Their occupation enable them to get a decent job with attractive money, these in turn enable them to have greater physical mobility and obtain the 'freedom to travel' extensively, expand their horizons and increase their joy and satisfaction towards life (though not necessarily towards their work).

Research results on family related variables, such as marital adjustment (Aryee & Stone, 1996), spouse support (Li, 1995), and family perceptions of the move (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1998) were mixed. Some found them unrelated to adjustment, others found that an expatriate's family experience becomes very much a part of his or her success or failure in assimilating into the new environment and performing well in the international assignment (Tung, 1981, 1982; Harvey, 1982, 1985; Aycan, 1997). Recent studies perceived value in having their spouse and family receive training in cross-cultural adjustment (e.g. Mukuda, 2001). In this research, one-third of the informants were married and represented the different stages of marital life: a young woman married without children, a middle-aged man with two children, a mature man approaching retirement, with grown up children living abroad. They had very different concerns and problems with adjustment to social and work lives. As perhaps expected, the man with young children faced most constraints as he would not want to socialize too much after work and leave his children and wife at home. But all these three married NETs affirmed the importance and appreciated the fact of having the support of their spouses who were staying in Hong Kong with them.

Length of tenure in foreign operations was found to be positively related to general and work adjustment (e.g., Gregersen & Black, 1990; 1991; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001), which means that the longer expatriates are stationed in a foreign country, the more comfortable they feel with local culture and work. Indeed the findings in this research also show that length of tenure may be positively related to the adjustments of NETs as they will be able to learn and become accustomed to the practices systems and values in the new culture in the initial period of time. However, in the longer term, this factor may have little impact. For example, Raymond had been working in Hong Kong for some nine years, and the longer he stayed in Hong Kong, the more sure he had become of the resistance to change by the local education system, and this phenomenon caused him to feel disappointed and frustrated in his work.

### **5.9.3. Culture-specific skills**

Fluency in host countries' foreign languages was expected to contribute to higher levels of interaction adjustment, because people with efficient host-country language will have more opportunities to gain information about the novel situation, and according to stress management theory, this will reduce the uncertainty (Boyle, 1997). However, some studies found the opposite (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000b; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002a).

In this research, informants unanimously agreed that it was unimportant for them to master the local language even though Hong Kong is an Asian city where Chinese is spoken by the majority of the people. NETs realized that Hong Kong is bilingual and that they could travel around easily by looking at the signs or instructions on the streets or shops. They also appreciated the fact that most local people could speak some English, enough for a shared communication. They reported that the inability to speak the local language posed some inconvenience or difficulties for them, particularly in the initial period of adjustment, as they would be cheated by merchants who thought they could not read the prices, and psychologically they might feel insecure as they could not always gain immediate access to information they needed and they could not understand their students when they conversed in Chinese. However, these problems or inconveniences could be handled or solved over time, e.g. they learnt to use non-verbal cues to communicate with

the locals when needed. They would team up with their local teaching partners and rely more on them to discipline the students. Most of them also learnt a little bit of the local language, what they describe as “kindergarten Chinese” to handle their needs.

Ward *et al.* (2001) provide an explanation which highlights the significance of personal and situational factors on adjustment and considered the interaction of at least three variables in adjustment issues: language fluency, expectations and hosts’ reactions. It may imply the need to consider the language similarity (Caligiuri, 2001) and the host country nationals’ foreign language skills, specifically the ability to speak the expatriate’s language.

#### **5.9.4 Relevant experiences and accurate expectations**

The literature review mentioned the importance of having knowledge and understanding of a host country before moving there. Some research identified realistic expectation facilitated adjustment (Averill, 1973; Hawes and Kealy, 1981) and highlighted the positive effects of providing realistic and accurate information before the occurrence of stress-provoking experiences (MacDonald and Kuiper, 1983; Weissman and Furnham, 1987).

However, this research indicated that most of the NETs did not have sufficient or accurate information or relevant experiences before, or upon, their arrival in Hong Kong, consequently, they generally lacked a realistic picture of their living environments and workplace, and conflicts, frustrations occurred easily, particularly at the beginning of their arrival. For example, the NETs were surprised to be allocated to low standard schools with unmotivated and low ability students. They observed that even some local teachers had broken down because they did not know how to handle ill-disciplined students. For them, the situation was “unexpected”, “difficult to deal with”, and “exhausting”, particularly during the initial period of adjustment in Hong Kong. They felt that having to deal with unmotivated low ability students was “a waste of the NETs’ time and government’s resources”. Therefore acquiring practical teaching experiences and adopting a realistic expectation of the teaching and learning situations in Hong Kong would be helpful for NETs to adjust to their work here. However, it was only after their arrival that they



realized it was so important for them to acquire relevant experiences and accurate expectations, particularly about their work.

“I thought the English level was quite high from the people I met, the people in hotels and restaurants. In my school, lots of students have no English or poor English, so that’s quite surprising. I didn’t expect that when I came to HK.” (Johnny)

“How would a 26 year old NET, who has never been to another country, who didn’t have friends here, how would they cope? It would be very difficult, especially if you got in a shit school. You’ll really freak out” (Machi)

“So I would say to that person, be sure you have some experiences, because you’ll be like a double shock if you just come in with no experience, and some NETs have been hired and are working with no previous experience.” (Raymond)

One main point is this research indicates that the NETs did not always have easy access to the training programmes that were important for them to acquire the skills and knowledge to gain cultural competence. The problems mainly lay in the logistical arrangements for the induction programmes such as timing and location. For example, Johnny, Machi and Donna all pointed out that they expected to have an induction program when they arrived, however, they were only able to join such a program six months after they had started working. They thought the program was “too late”, and they “don’t need it now”, and hence felt “extremely disappointed” and that it was “a wastage of time” to attend such programs. George added that there were some follow-up training programs for NETs throughout the years, but he noticed that not many NETs would go because of the location of the training venues, many of them being held in the new territories, which was a long distance to go for NETs working in city centres.

Moreover, there was also no strong evidence showing that NETs felt well prepared after attending these induction programs. For example, all of them mentioned their surprise in meeting with low ability students and were taken aback by the dictatorial style of management and the textbook focused teaching approach being practiced in the schools. It was also frustrating for NETs to be encouraged in the induction programs to initiate

changes in schools while, in reality, all of them were met with strong resistance from colleagues to changes that they had tried to propose.

The finding further highlights the complications of arranging effective induction programs for “strangers” to a new culture. In fact, Bennett (1993) found that even if cross-cultural training tools are well produced and used correctly, learners are still likely to experience a degree of disorientation and confusion as they struggle with the implications of day-to-day experiences in the new environment. A key feature in facilitating cross-cultural adjustment may lie in the need to help expatriates form accurate expectations instead of merely providing factual information for their own interpretations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Caligiuri, 2001). Lastly, as Feng (2009: 72) suggested, “organizations and individuals who perceive the needs for intercultural knowledge and skills and take initiatives to develop them on their own may become interculturally competent to meet challenges in the changing circumstances”. Helping expatriates to develop the skills needed to behave and manage the emotional stress appropriately is also important (Harrison & Hopkins, 1967; Lobel, 1990; Paige, 1993; Tolbert & McLean, 1995; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996).

In addition, as shown in this research, NETs also realize differences in many aspects in their work and life such as the physical environment, the educational system, the people and their values, they also observe some similarities among cultures, highlighting the complex nature of cross-cultural contacts in the era of globalization. Researchers emphasized the importance of gathering accurate information about strangers but warned of the possibility of reinforcing stereotypes of strangers when inaccurate information was provided through training (Wilder & Shapiro, 1989). A major implication is that it is perhaps rather fruitless to stereotype responses or try to apply typologies of responses in cross-cultural training.

This research also highlights the importance of the points that prospective employers or co-workers of the NETs, or expatriates in general, should also be provided with pertinent training to ensure that they work in collaboration with their expatriate employers and colleagues. This is a neglected area in respect of Hong Kong and more widely. More research in this aspect can shed more light on the role, contents, timing of training and its

effectiveness to the success or failure of the overseas assignment of the NETs in particular, and expatriates in general.

### **5.9.5 Environmental factors**

Research generally supports the view that the greater the difference between the host country's culture or living conditions and the home country's culture or living conditions, the more difficult the adjustment process is likely to be (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Aryee & Stone, 1996; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001). However, evidence for the relationship between some environmental factors such as cultural novelty and general adjustment has been mixed.

As mentioned in chapter two, research found some significant differences between western and eastern cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1988; Bond, 1991). Even though such research has been criticized (see chapter two of this thesis), nevertheless in the case of the sojourners here, these differences in practice, values etc. caused several misunderstandings, troubles, conflicts and frustrations in the process of cross-cultural interaction. On the surface, Hong Kong, as an Asian city, differs greatly from the western home countries from which the NETs, including those from England, Australia, Trinidad etc. originated. The NETs did observe differences in the values and behaviours between them and the Hongkongers. For example, the locals would not express their dissatisfaction or disagreements directly, particularly to their supervisors. These reflected the subtle, indirect and collectivistic characteristics commonly found in Chinese.

However, NETs also observed many similarities in this eastern culture. For example, Jacky and Johnny, coming from England, commented that Hong Kong is easy to adapt as they can watch English football, English newspapers, English movies always and people can mostly communicate with them in English. The reason given was the English legacy left in the former colony. Hence, even though Hong Kong may be very different from England, the English cultural influence can still be felt. This indicates that the history and cultural mix of a place needs to be considered when assessing the cultural distance.

Social, political and economic characteristics of the society of settlement may also affect cross-cultural adjustment (Korn-Ferry International, 1981; Yoshida *et al.*, 1997). The respondents in this research affirm this claim as they felt that the internationalism of Hong Kong made it an easy to which to adapt. 'London is international....Hong Kong may be...more' said Johnny. 'I may have overused the world internationalism, but Hong Kong has more of an international feel than other Asian countries...makes it easy for westerners to adjust' (Raymond). Coming from a less developed country in the Caribbean, Donna found it much easier to adjust in Hong Kong as she could easily find the things she needed.

However, other studies found that expatriates felt happier and more satisfied in rural locales where traditional patterns of indigenous culture are more consistently observed (Guskin, 1966). This contradictory result may be a result of interaction between the characteristics of the individual in transition, the acculturating group, the culture of origin, and the culture of settlement that affects the adjustment process (Ward *et al.*, 2001). As said, this, in turn, suggests that the empirical research needs to examine the issues of cross-cultural adjustment through the eyes of each individual sojourner, and the study here addresses this feature.

## **5.10 CONCLUSION**

The findings show that there are wide variations in respect of the degree, mode, and patterns of adjustments of the expatriates in a different culture. The research also identifies various factors that may contribute to the success or failure of the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs, which may have implications for the adjustment of expatriates in general.

Ward and Chang (1997) proposed the 'cultural fit' hypothesis. They highlighted the significance of the person-to-situation interaction and suggested that, in many cases, it is not personality *per se* that predicts cross-cultural adjustment, but rather the 'cultural-fit' between the acculturating individual and the host culture's norms. Hence there is the argument that greater attention should be paid to the person-to-situation interaction and the notion of cultural fit (Church, 1982; Furham and Bochner, 1986).

As mentioned earlier, while there is extensive research investigating intercultural adaptation in western countries, particularly in the United States, there are comparatively fewer studies investigating the adaptation of westerners in Asian cultures. This chapter and thesis have added to the limited existing discussions of expatriates' adjustments in Asian cities and demonstrated the need for further research. Given the limited scope of the present study, this study could constitute a pre-pilot for a more extensive survey in Hong Kong. It raises issues that could be explored in a large-scale survey, and it offers some observations of, and suggestions for addressing, the problems of the high attrition rate and ineffectiveness of the Hong Kong NET scheme.

The next chapter will summarize the findings in respect of the answers of the research questions, and it will discuss the implications of the findings to practice, theory and research. The limitations and strengths of the research will also be reviewed.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter provides main answers to the research questions and draws conclusions and recommendations from the study. It also provides a retrospective critique of the thesis, its strengths and limitations and concludes with some closing remarks. The hypothesis that the study wished to defend was that ‘the effectiveness of the NET scheme is affected by the extent to which issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed sufficiently’.

The literature review provided a theoretical grounding for the empirical research, indicating the main concepts, approaches to, and areas of concern within, the field of cross-cultural adjustment, and this led into the empirical study, which comprised an investigation into issues in, and experiences of, cross-cultural adjustment with a group of NETs in Hong Kong. The thesis was prompted by the concern expressed in Hong Kong about the high attrition rate of NETs, and was intended to provide a grounded theory to explain this high attrition rate, rooted in theories of cross-cultural adjustment. Having conducted the empirical research, the thesis that this study wishes to defend is that the effectiveness of the NET scheme is affected by the extent to which issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed sufficiently, and that the high attrition rate can be explained, in part, by neglect of issues in cross-cultural adjustment, both in terms of the sojourners and of the host culture.

Further, the thesis argues that steps should be taken to address issues of cross-cultural adjustment at the earliest possible stages of the NETs’ experiences in Hong Kong, prior to their arrival, in the early stages of their arrival, and during their stay in Hong Kong, and, moreover, that attention should be given not only to the NETs themselves, but to their host schools. Induction programmes should be provided, and early, and schools in Hong Kong should be properly prepared to receive NETs and to accommodate them appropriately. These points are addressed in this closing chapter.

## **6.1 KEY FINDINGS AND ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **6.1.1 Key findings**

The main questions of this study were: what are the adjustment experiences of the Native-speaking English Teachers (NETs) in Hong Kong, and how do they respond to the changes in a new cultural environment? Specifically, there were five research questions (see chapter three):

1. Why might the policies for NETs in Hong Kong not be working as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention?
2. How far can theories of cross-cultural adjustment explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong and explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively?
3. What recommendations for interventions can be made to improve the operations of the NETs scheme?
4. What insights into cross-cultural adjustment are given by NETs that might increase the success of the NET policy implementation?
5. How can the government policy for NETs fulfill its potential by taking account of cross-cultural adjustment?

To answer these questions in-depth interviews were conducted with NETs in Hong Kong, designed to address the range of ages, age groups taught, sex, marital status, length of stay in Hong Kong, teaching qualifications and experiences, and kinds of schools in Hong Kong. The answers to the research questions are provided for each question after a summary of the main points from the interviews. The study specifically explored key issues and experience of the NETs in Hong Kong, particularly through the lens of cross-cultural adjustment. These are reported below, followed by the answers provided for each research question.

#### *6.1.1.1 What were the major changes the NETs experienced after they arrived in Hong Kong?*

The NETs found a lot of differences between Hong Kong and their home countries, from their physical appearances, the physical and social environment, the people, the work and to the culture. They noticed that they looked and sounded different. The locals treated them negatively or positively, mainly depending on their skin colour and sex. Female white expatriates would be treated with more respect ostensibly, for example, the locals would make way for them to pass down the street, they would, however, be cheated by the locals who thought that they did not understand Chinese and would charge them higher prizes for goods or services. Male white expatriates would feel rejected by the locals as the people often refused to sit next to them on public transport. Both male and female expatriates found themselves stared at a lot by the locals, which made them feel uneasy. Female non-white expatriates would be taken to be Philippino maids and hence would be looked down upon and treated rudely by the locals.

The NETs also noticed differences in the physical environment. They liked the mild winter, the safety and good hygiene. They enjoy exploring the different parts of the city and experiencing the novelty of the environment. On the other hand, they disliked the hot humid summer and found the air and noise pollution worsening.

They were very impressed by the social environment of Hong Kong. They found the local transportation very efficient and convenient, which gave them the freedom to travel and enabled them to get connected with other parts of the world. They enjoyed the wide selection of assorted types of food and entertainments. They found the cost of living here low. They appreciated the internationalism of the city and found Hong Kong exciting and energetic.

However, they perceived Hong Kong people to be energetic, but impolite, busy, rushing, and stressed. They felt that, while Hong Kong people liked to show off their affluence, they would not express their feelings directly. They were very puzzled by this great cultural difference. To them, the Hong Kong people were “cosmetic” and the culture was



“subtle”. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this affirmed the studies on the differences between western and eastern cultures.

Concerning their work, NETs realized that there were many job opportunities for the expatriate teaching professionals in Hong Kong, they gained both external and internal rewards from their work in terms of monetary return and job satisfaction. However, they found the Hong Kong educational system and disciplinary methods rather different from those of the western countries, they disliked the textbook focused approach, and some did not appreciate the “workaholic” culture and a lack of democracy in the workplace.

Although on the surface it appears that almost everything was different in Hong Kong, some did appreciate some cultural similarities between this city and the western countries mainly due to the influence and legacy of the British colonial rule in Hong Kong. English-speaking expatriates, especially those coming from England, found it easy to communicate in English and they had easy access to western entertainment like English newspapers, English football, and English films.

Some NETs perceived similarities between eastern and western cultures in aspects like food, language and human nature. They found that some words in the languages sounded similar and may have shared common word roots. The ways in which some of the food was prepared also appeared similar. Finally, they found the basic nature of people to be alike all around the world.

#### *6.1.1.2 How would NETs respond in the face of the changes in a new environment?*

The NETs demonstrated great flexibility in the face of these challenges. If something constructive could be done about the problems or difficulties they encountered in their daily life or the workplace, they would take actions to alter or improve the situation, and engage the help of others if required; otherwise, they may refrain from taking actions until the right time came, or they would try to ignore the situation, find their ways of escape, accept the reality or reinterpret the reality positively.

How would they describe their experiences after working and living here for some time? Most NETs described their experiences as enjoyable, exciting and wonderful, or even perfect, regardless of the initial difficulties or on-going problems they may have encountered. They considered the process a learning opportunity in which they had realized some positive changes in themselves; for many of them, it was also a journey of self discovery and personal growth.

The above shows that cross-cultural adjustment is an experience that deeply affects the perceptions, feelings, thinking, and behaviour of the NETs in a new cultural environment, among many other factors. To investigate into this matter will provide more valuable information and insights for the Education Bureau to improve the NET scheme by reducing the psychological and practical problems that NETs may encounter culturally, and subsequently reduce the NET attrition rate.

*6.1.1.3 How did the NETs find the NET scheme in Hong Kong and what did they say about the induction programme?*

Many NETs experienced difficulties in settling down in the new environment upon their arrival. They reported that surprisingly little assistance was provided by the schools or the Hong Kong government in areas like searching for accommodation, knowing the city, patronizing services such as telephone, internet and banking etc.. The NETs mentioned about being given a package of information before or upon their arrival. As one informant pointed out, only those who had the time and initiative to study the materials carefully would find some useful telephone numbers or addresses to contact. However, if the government or the school can take an extra step to assign a local teacher to be the main contact point or the buddy of the NET during the first few weeks or months upon their arrival, many of the problems experienced could have been largely avoided.

As the NETs pointed out, it was important for the government and the schools to strengthen their coordination and provide relevant information or training to the NETs immediately upon their arrival in Hong Kong. Initial assistance in practical matters such as looking for accommodation, orientation to the teaching practice and school systems should be given to the NETs to facilitate their adjustment.

Most NETs were not satisfied with the arrangement, in particular the timing of cross-cultural training. Firstly, it would definitely be helpful if the workshops were organized before the NETs start their work and life in Hong Kong. Some NETs were recruited late and they were urged to start teaching immediately in school. Others might be joining the NET scheme due to a switch of job in Hong Kong. A range of reasons, including these mentioned here, caused them to miss the induction program organized by the government before the school started. NETs usually would not study the city in depth before they came, or, in reality, it might not always be of too much help for one to visit a place for leisure as the work experience can be very different. These NETs usually encountered many disasters when they started working and had to overcome a lot of barriers before they would adapt or settle down. The government should provide them with an induction program before they started working so as to give them the necessary information and a network of support.

NETs were mostly surprised by the low standards of students, the dictatorial leadership of the principals, the ethos of teaching which focused much on textbooks and placed emphasis on rote learning. In their daily life, they were taken aback that they would often be stared at, rejected or cheated by the locals. They also found some behaviour of the locals surprising. This shows that the content of the induction program may have to be improved in that more truthful information of the social and work lives in Hong Kong should be presented so as to help the NETs acquire realistic information and accurate expectations of Hong Kong.

As regards the NET scheme, while some NETs found it professional when compared with similar programmes implemented in other Asian countries, for those working in the system for a longer period of time, they realized that the content of the scheme had not been much improved throughout the years, although similar schemes had been repeatedly launched by the government. Therefore there came from them the suggestion that the government should install more stringent mechanisms to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the scheme. Moreover, the NETs, as the change agents deployed to promote constructive changes in schools, should also be provided with the proper channels

for their voices, concerns, observations and suggestions to be collected and be empowered to push forward the changes.

Reflecting on their experiences, the NETs teachers provided some advice for prospective NETs to consider. Firstly, they should adopt the right attitude when they decide to accept the challenge to live and work in a culturally different environment, they should be open, positive, flexible, able to relax and adopt a sense of humour under stressful situations. Willingness and flexibility to adapt are indeed very important for them to gain intercultural competence: “To become interculturally competent, it (exposure) has to go with willingness to relate to otherness, skills to mediate between cultures and actions to explore third space” (Feng, 2009: 88). Moreover, they also needed to build up their social network by making more friends, local or western, to engage their support for instrumental or affective reasons. It is also important for NETs to be psychologically prepared to be assigned to some “very poor” schools with unmotivated and low abilities students. Despite the difficulties in teaching, the NETs believed the experiences were valuable for their personal growth and development, they admitted that they had come through the challenges with a broadened horizon and had become -more responsible and independent persons.

### **6.1.2 Answering the research questions**

From the interview data, combined, where relevant, with the literature review, specific answers to the research questions can be provided. This is addressed below.

#### *6.1.2.1 Research question one: Why might the policies for NETs in Hong Kong not be working as straightforwardly in practice as they are in intention?*

This thesis has argued that the policies for NETs in Hong Kong might not be working out as effectively in practice as they are in intention because insufficient attention has been given to the issues of cross-cultural adjustment by the NETS, at all stages of their sojourn, beginning even before they arrive, and that the government’s education department has given seriously insufficient attention to this and has provide untimely and poorly organized and administered cross-cultural training and development programmes for both the sojourners and the schools. Further, it is argued that the schools in which NETS work

have been inadequately prepared to receive and accommodate the NETS, from cross-cultural perspectives and their related elements of organizational and pedagogical matters. In cross-cultural terms, NETs have been inadequately prepared prior to their sojourn, they have been inadequately prepared upon arrival and during their stay, and they have been inadequately supported in terms of cross-cultural adjustment by the government and the schools at all stages of their sojourn. Further, the schools themselves have not been prepared sufficiently to receive NETs and to work with their potential contribution and potential as change agents.

*6.1.2.2 Research question two: How far can theories of cross-cultural adjustment explain the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong and explain why adjustment was or was not working effectively?*

It is suggested here that both theories and practices of cross-cultural adjustment can usefully explain, in part, the situation of language teachers in unfamiliar environments, particularly in respect of NETs in Hong Kong, and explain why cross-cultural (and other forms of) adjustment was or was not working effectively. It was noted that the Hong Kong government had taken other steps to reduce the attrition rate (e.g. financial incentives) but that, whilst these had reduced it slightly, it had not solved the problem.

Hence the research explored the extent to which the problems and their solutions lay elsewhere, and the interview data, coupled with the literature review, provided powerful evidence that problems and solutions lay in the field of cross-cultural adjustment and adequate cross-cultural adjustment. In looking to these theories, it is important to note that there is no single theory of cross-cultural adjustment, and that, rather, there are several theories, and that these have different areas of focus, some focusing on personality matters, others on physical features and matters of everyday survival, others on different stages of cross-cultural adjustment and so on. Hence it is argued there that, for a theory of cross-cultural adjustment to be applicable in explaining the situation of sojourners and NETs requires awareness of the fact that this is a multi-dimension, multi-faceted concept that evolves, changes and applies differentially over the duration of the sojourn.

Theories of cross-cultural adjustment can provide part of the explanation for the situation of sojourners and NETs in Hong Kong. However, it was also shown that other issues, not simply or solely cross-cultural matters, were also important, for example: social support and networking, having a social life, family life, the geographical location of the schools and the sojourners' accommodation, the use to which the NETs were being put in the schools, the task requirements of the NETs, the teaching load and pedagogical requirements of the NETs, the use of NETs as change agents, the social isolation of many of the NETs, maximizing the role of NETs (e.g. ensuring the careful match of their expertise and particular potential to working with the most suitable students in schools) and incentives (e.g. holidays and career promotion).

Several of the problems encountered by the NETs, particularly in terms of the workplace, were problems that could be encountered by anyone starting a new job and having to familiarize oneself with new working practices; however, in this case here such problems were exacerbated by the immense culture shock that several of the NETs mentioned. Whilst a new job will present a culture shock even for local teachers, as they have to find their way through new organizational cultures and practices, this is double the case (or more) for NETs, as the requirement to adjust to a new school culture is exacerbated by having to work in an entirely new community, linguistic, cultural, social and valiative environment. Cross-cultural adjustment has many layers for the NETs.

Hence theories of cross-cultural adjustment are part of a larger web of matters that influence sojourners and, in particular here, NETs in Hong Kong.

#### *6.1.2.3 Research question three: What recommendations for interventions can be made to improve the operations of the NETs scheme?*

Recommendations for interventions to improve the NETs scheme fall both within and outside the field of cross-cultural adjustment. With regard to cross-cultural adjustment, it is recommended that significant improvements be made to the preparation and training in cross-cultural matters of NETs, prior to, on arrival in, and during the stay of NETs in Hong Kong. This is a major implication of this thesis, and it has significant implications for the Hong Kong government's programmes of preparation, induction and ongoing

support. Interventions in this respect must be timely, highly organized, carefully administered and personalized, to meet different needs, also providing social and pedagogical support for NETs and, where appropriate, their families. To cast NETs adrift in strange, unfamiliar surrounding and cultures is an abrogation of professional responsibility, yet this is the experience that many of the NETs reported in this study. Further, the interventions are not confined to cross-cultural matters; they include providing much greater personal attention to NETs, including their accommodation and social needs.

Moreover, for cross-cultural adjustment to work most beneficially requires attention to be given to the host culture, the host school and its organization, and the Hong Kong government has a major role to play here in the preparation and support given to the schools in which NETs are placed here. Hoyle (1975) uses the analogy of a heart transplant – one cannot simply implant a new, donor heart (a NET) into an unprepared recipient's body (the school); this is to risk 'tissue rejection'. Rather, he writes, it is important to prepare the recipient to receive the new organ. Here the school has to be prepared to welcome, accommodate and receive the NET, and, from the interview data gathered here, not only were the schools unprepared but some were hostile to the NETs and, indeed they had not been sufficiently prepared or trained to receive the NETs and to maximize their contribution.

The details of how to prepare NETS and schools to maximize their roles include:

- Careful recruitment of NETS in order to ensure that NETS are fully aware of all aspects of the scheme, the culture, the schools and the pedagogical and organizational matters before they consent to becoming NETs.
- Adequate communication between the Hong Kong government officers and the NETs;
- Adequate induction of NETs into what they might find when they go into schools and how to handle what they find;
- Adequate preparation of schools to receive and work with NETs;
- Adequate ongoing support structures, channels and activities for NETs, to provide

developed social, material, accommodation, administrative, personal, emotional and face-to-face support and association between NETS, and to provide advice on all matters of cross-cultural adjustment, together with financial, pedagogical, school organizational, administrative, social, and day-to-day matters.

- A hotline for addressing matters that arise with NETs, so that they can have immediate and in-depth attention on demand.
- A central government agency that handles not only enquiries and administrative matters for prospective and existing NETs, but that provides ongoing, everyday, personalized and development of NETs, including their personal, social, financial, pedagogical, and cultural matters, i.e. it moves from being an office to being a service.

*6.1.2.4 Research question four: What insights into cross-cultural adjustment are given by NETs that might increase the success of the NET policy implementation?*

The interview data indicate that cross-cultural adjustments were indeed a significant feature in the eyes of the participants, and that these concerned ensuring that the NETs were suitably prepared in terms of what to expect, how to handle situations in which cross-cultural matters might feature, how to handle everyday affairs of living (e.g. some tips on what to look out for in, for example, shopping, traveling, what not to be shocked by, and problems of racism in Hong Kong). The NETs indicate that cross-cultural adjustment is not just a “one-off” affair that can be solved by a brief induction program, but that it was an ongoing, evolutionary matter that required ongoing support and development. The issues facing new NETS (e.g. gross/severe culture shock) were different from those facing NETS who had been longer in Hong Kong (e.g. how to accommodate themselves to non-democratic schools, pedagogical and assessment procedures with which they did not agree, the “workaholic” atmosphere and its accompanying stress).

Further, the interview data reveal that there are no single or simple patterns of cross-cultural adjustment by the NETs; each NET told his or her own story, and each story was different. This is important, for it argues that, just as cross-cultural adjustment is an individual matter, so provision for the training, development and ongoing support for NETs must be an individually tailored and individually differentiated matter. This is a



major finding, for it suggests the provision of a central department for NETs in the Hong Kong government, that moves beyond simply administrative matters to personal and individual matters on a day-to-day and ongoing basis. These are points from the perspective of the NETS, but they impact on the role of the support agencies and services for NETs, so that the cross-cultural adjustment of NETs is not an individual or isolated matter, but is placed centrally in the service provided by the Hong Kong government; this is a major implication.

Further, as indicated earlier, cross-cultural adjustment is a two-way matter, and the NETs indicated clearly that the other parties involved (schools, the Hong Kong government's education department) were not sufficiently trained to receive the NETS, were not prepared to change themselves and were not prepared to host properly those NETs teachers who came from very different cultures. The “ ‘sink or swim without help” atmosphere of many schools was a problem to which many NETs alluded, with the NETs being left to struggle by the schools, indeed in the face of some hostility by some schools. The issue here is that the schools themselves have to be as open to change and cultural accommodation as the NETS, but this was repeatedly reported to be not the case by the interviewees. Cross-cultural adjustment, then, requires changes and accommodations to be made by all the relevant parties, and the role of the Hong Kong government in ensuring and developing this was seen to be crucial by the NETs.

*6.1.2.5 Research question five: How can the government policy for NETs fulfill its potential by taking account of cross-cultural adjustment?*

As mentioned above, for the government policy to fulfill its potential requires a radical shift in the services that it provides for the NETs (and from all points in a temporal sequence, from early enquiries to recruitment, induction and ongoing sojourn). Firstly, it requires a service mentality to replace an administrative mentality by the Hong Kong government, essentially enlarging the scope of its activities and support. Not only is this in terms of (a) *time*, being on an ongoing rather than solely – or largely – “one-off”, but also in terms of (b) *scope*, providing all-round care, support and help to NETS, with the provision of a host of services and social networking and supportive interventions to accommodate issues of culture shock and cross-cultural preparation and adjustment, in

terms of (c) *parties*, focusing not only on NETs, but their families, the schools, and, indeed their own role as a government agency providing service and support, and in terms of (d) *people*, attending to individual and individually differentiated needs, problems, levels of culture shock and stress, and in terms of listening to NET's voices and having extensive communication with and between them, a humanistic turn rather than largely an administrative view of managing NETs. This, in turn, requires a change in the culture of the schools and the Hong Kong government department, from being closed and perhaps unwilling to change, to being open and willing to address and accommodate change. It moves from a rigid, bureaucratic, sometimes out-of-touch organizational model of managing NETs and their work (as reported by the NETs themselves in the interviews) to an open, flexible and person-centred and in-touch model of managing NETs, their work and their lives. It implies regarding NETs as professionals rather than functionaries, as humans rather than as resources simply to be manipulated. Further, it requires close attention to be given to cross-cultural adjustment in all its range of issues.

It is argued that attending to the cross-cultural adjustment of NETs, their schools and the Hong Kong government's education department itself, can contribute to enabling the NET scheme to maximize its potential.

## **6.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

Through the interviews and experiences of the NETs, who were a professional group of English speaking expatriates, this study offers several suggested avenues to pursue future research on the topic of expatriates' cross-cultural experiences and responses in Asian cities or countries. Research can delve deeper into the experiences in and responses to the social life and workplace on this or similar samples of NET expatriates in Hong Kong. For example, if budget and time were to allow, studies can also be undertaken to track down the NETs who have terminated their contracts, including those who have switched to other professions in Hong Kong, or those who have departed from Hong Kong. Questions one could ask include reasons for their arrival and departure from Hong Kong, their experiences, responses, observations and suggestions on the NET scheme, and their inclination to undertake other overseas assignments, perhaps in Asian cities in particular. They may have very different stories and perspectives to tell.

Research can also be conducted with the fellow teachers and employers of the NETs to provide supplementary information on the NETs' experiences. This recognizes that the present study was deliberately limited in its scope and sample, seeking the views of the NETs only, and it is recognized that this might present a rather one-sided view only. Hence widening the sample to include more parties (including members of the Hong Kong government's officers who work in this field perhaps) will give a more balanced, all-round view of the situation. The data from a wider sample of different stakeholders can be compared with the results of this research, with differences and similarities identified and analyzed. Research can also be extended to investigate and compare the experiences and responses of NETs (or expatriate primary and secondary teachers recruited under similar schemes) in other Asian cities, such as cities in mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea.

Although most of the NETs interviewed were single, it would also be worthwhile to study the experiences of the family members of those who are either married NETs or the spouses of NETs. They seem to be a neglected group of sojourners in foreign soils, as induction programmes would normally not be organized for them and they do not have a given network of friends, i.e. fellow colleagues in the workplace, to share and provide information. However, their presence, experiences and responses may have a significant influence on the NETs. Their experiences will also provide additional insightful information on the wider topic of expatriates' cross-cultural experiences.

As literature reveals and the NETs have affirmed, there are various facets of adjustment in a cross-cultural setting, including but not limited to work and daily living. Research can be undertaken to delve deeper into the distinct facets of adjustments and identify the various patterns for each facet of adjustment, to investigate if culture shock occurs in any or all of the facets of adjustments as well as the responses NETs made to various circumstances. Different factors may facilitate or hamper different facets of adjustments.

Previous research affirmed the need for provision of training for expatriates, to equip them with knowledge of the host environment, help them form accurate expectations or develop the skills needed to behave and manage the emotional stresses appropriately (e.g. Harrison

& Hopkins, 1967; Lobel, 1990; Paige, 1993; Tolbert & McLean, 1995; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). Some studies indicated that knowledge of the host culture in the pre-departure stage was positively related to general adjustment (Black, 1988; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002a). In this study, the NETs suggested that it is important for them to receive a comprehensive and effective induction programme immediately upon their arrival in Hong Kong rather than months after they have settled down, otherwise the eventual workshops would become a waste of time and effort as they have already experienced many of the difficulties and problems on their own. It is worth studying when training sessions should be held to maximize the effectiveness of the induction programmes for the NETs.

Secondly, as mentioned above, there is still a lot to be learnt regarding how and what to provide in the training to expatriates. Some studies (e.g. Alred *et al.*, 2003; Guilherme *et al.*, 2009) advocate the importance of developing the abilities of sojourners to reflect and analyze so as to learn and adjust in the new culture. However, more research is needed to discover the effective types and modes of activities that should be included in training to enhance the adjustment skills of expatriates.

Thirdly, in face of the strong resistance to change at many Hong Kong schools, as reported by the NETs in the interviews, the NETs also suggest that training be provided for their principals and co-workers to make them embrace the changes that the NETs are supposed to promote. This research highlights the importance that prospective employers or co-workers with the NETs, or expatriates in general, should also be provided with pertinent training to ensure that they work in collaboration with their expatriate employers. This is an area not much discussed or researched before. More research in this aspect can shed more light on the role, contents, timing of training and its effectiveness to the success or failure of the overseas assignment of the NETs in particular, and expatriates in general.

Lastly, this study affirms the importance of preparing sojourners to address their own development of cross-cultural competence, and to be supported in this development. How far this was supported in the expatriates can be further explored in the empirical investigation. In addition, it is also worth undertaking more research to study the

willingness of host cultures to provide support structures and suitable preparations for this in both the sojourners and the host institution.

In summary, further research needs to widen the scope of the present study, widen the sample to include different parties, adopt different methodologies for data collection in order to pursue the topics in greater detail, widen the range of topics addressed in the field, to include different aspects of adjustment and also training programmes, and move from a one-shot study to a longitudinal study in order to investigate cross-cultural adjustment of sojourners over time.

### **6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY**

One of the important findings of this study is that not all NETs experienced culture shock in a culturally different environment. Not all NETs considered themselves to have experienced culture shock symptoms. While some recalled having experienced “loneliness”, “sadness” and “homesickness”, others thought their experiences overall were positive throughout their stay in Hong Kong, some even claimed they had no culture shock at all. The findings also show that the patterns of their cross-cultural adjustments vary considerably; some may follow a U-curve; others may be a rising line starting from a low end to high point; some may be just a horizontal line starting from a high end and remaining quite stable thereafter, i.e. there are no simple or overall patterns of adjustment; adjustment is an individually mediated matter.

Black and colleagues (1988; 1989; 1991) identified three facets of adjustment: work, general and interaction adjustments. Others have conceptualized adjustment slightly differently, in terms of, for example, psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment, and work adjustment. From the research findings, it is apparent that, to most NETs, work and daily living were two different facets of adjustment. While they perceived their daily living to be comparatively easy to adjust despite some hiccups or negative incidents, adjusting to the work culture in Hong Kong was very different. All of them encountered frustrations and conflicts at work, particularly in the initial period upon arrival, and, in an extreme case, the working remained a daily irritation to the NET concerned. Adjustment

problems occurred much more often in the workplace than in the daily lives of NETs in Hong Kong. This is an important finding, for it suggests that induction programmes should target issues of daily living and not solely working in a culturally different school environment.

Moreover, the results of cultural contact can be very complex. The study finds evidence to support the view that the NETs relate to the host country in different modes at different time, mostly adopting a mode of cultural hybridity (Berry, 1992; Martin and Nakayama, 2007). They may assimilate on one occasion, but attempt to keep a distance from the locals on other occasions, they may want economic assimilation through their employment, but marginalization in their social and private lives.

It is also important to note that most situations elicited both types of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. The NETs employed a mixed range of strategies in coping with the changes, differences or barriers. The study supports the literature findings that, in situations in which NETs feel themselves in control, they will use problem-focused methods, and that if they cannot do things to alter the situations, they tend to rely on emotion-focused methods. There were no significant sex differences in the coping responses, except that females mentioned more about seeking help for affective reasons.

Moreover, in the multitude of research about expatriates' cross-cultural experiences and coping, it was found that emotion-focused coping such as expatriate refuge and expatriate escapism, whereby expatriates attempt to minimize anxieties by physically or mentally withdrawing from the situation or avoiding the problem, have negative relations to adjustment in one or more facets (Selmer, 1999; 2001). However, in this study, emotion-focused coping such as ignoring the reality, accepting the reality as it is, finding ones' escape or having a break from Hong Kong did help the NETs release their pressure belts, obtain a breathing space from the stress, and enabled them to adopt a positive attitude and perception. It seems that both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping may facilitate cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs, depending on the circumstances in which the coping responses are employed.

In summary, then, the theories of cross-cultural adjustment reviewed in the literature review were found to be supported, but, importantly, it was in terms of the interplay and interactions of many theories rather than a single theory. Just as cross-cultural adjustment has many dimensions, so to understand those requires a range of different theories to be employed simultaneously. An overall theory of cross-cultural adjustment, then, would have to say that there is no single theory, no meta-theory of cross-cultural adjustment, but that there are many. Hence those researching the field of cross-cultural adjustment would need to specify which theoretical lenses that they are using to investigate the topic.

## **6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The study of the NETs' experiences and perceptions aims to provide some constructive suggestions for both the government and the schools to consider when making plans to improve the Native English Teachers (NET) Scheme, notably in improving the communication among the government, schools and NETs, and providing some helpful references for improving the training programmes for prospective NETs to facilitate their ongoing cross-cultural adjustment.

### **6.4.1 Suggestions for improvement to the NET scheme**

Firstly, the NETs interviewed had been teaching in local schools for some time, ranging from 1.5 years to some 9 years. As insiders, they could certainly and clearly provide valuable suggestions for the government and schools to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the NET Scheme to make pertinent improvement as appropriate.

#### *.4.1.1 Empower the NETs as change agents in schools*

NETs have been described as “change agents” who will “provide an authentic environment for children to learn English, develop children's interest in learning the language, help local teachers develop innovative learning and teaching methods and materials, and disseminate good practices” (Gibb, 2003d). They would be introduced to the request to bring in new teaching and learning methods at the induction programmes.

Many NET participants were therefore taken aback when they encountered strong resistance to change in their schools.

“because like learning things from the EDB, they wanted to change the school system, going back from the EDB workshops, I said they should try that, they were reluctant to try, initially there was some friction.” (Jacky)

“But the climate of the school is such that when teachers coming in, they want to do things differently, they aren’t supported by the school board. They support the older teachers, we value our older teachers, experienced teachers, so don’t make trouble. If you want to make changes, you have to do it little by little.” (George)

“No matter what the government and the EDB pretend to say and do, deep down, they’re not. They say they are changing, they produce documents to say they’re changing. They put in new agencies of changes. . . . They may have different names, but it’s the same thing. . . . Unfortunately the schools I’ve been in, have not used me the NET as the change agent.” (Raymond)

NETs describe the experience as “negative” and “total total shock”. They find the schools “reluctant”, “pretentious” and “unsupportive” towards the changes they want to initiate. The NETs have been regarded as outsiders who make trouble; hence friction and frustration result.

Change is unavoidable in any organizations that strive to stay competitive in today’s complex world. Literature reveals that attempting to convert the whole organization to an acceptance of change is difficult and change agents often have to cope with the tactical political manoeuvring of other powerful stakeholders resistant to change (Barrier, 1998; Daft, 1999). One major problem of overcoming resistance may be the lack of power to undertake such activity (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). This is the main frustration of the NETs as often they find themselves not supported by the schools to initiate changes. Moreover, members of a new-venture group, such as the NETs in this research, may be surprised when employees in the regular organization do not support or approve of



changes out of various reasons like self-interest, lack of understanding and trust, or uncertainty (Daft, 1999).

#### *Recommendation*

Daft (1999) pointed out that the visible support of top management can effectively help overcome resistance to change, and successful structural change can be accomplished through a top-down approach. NETs found the school principals vested with absolute power in Hong Kong. The appeal of NETs such as George and Machi was to provide training to the school principals and teachers to educate them to embrace necessary changes as well. Assistance and support must be provided to the NETs from the senior management of the school, among other strategies, to empower them to implement the changes.

#### *6.4.1.2 Review the induction programmes to enhance their effectiveness*

Research affirmed the need for provision of training to expatriates to equip them with knowledge of the host environment, to help them form accurate expectations and to develop the skills needed to behave and manage the emotional stress appropriately (Harrison & Hopkins, 1967; Lobel, 1990; Paige, 1993; Tolbert & McLean, 1995; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). The NETs all affirmed the importance of induction programmes to help them adjust in the new environment. However, this research indicates that the NETs did not always have easy access to the training programmes for them to acquire the skills and knowledge to gain cultural competencies. The problems mainly lay in the timing and location of the induction programmes organized by the EDB for the NETs. Their feedback to the EDB induction programmes varied, and was mainly dependent on the timing of the programmes.

“You need it when you get to Hong Kong. . . . This year, the NETs did not have it before the NETs started to work. They had some programmes in October or November. You already have all your bad experiences, you already had your problems or whatever, you need to know before. Too late.” (Donna)

“I came in March, I didn’t have an induction programme. . . . I think, should have been something. . . . Then I went to the induction programme 6 months later I joined the school. Was it helpful? No.” (Johnny)

“Extremely disappointed. . . . I didn’t have my first day until May, 2007, I’ve been here 6 months already. . . . I needed it when I first got here. I don’t need it now. It isn’t quite right to do so.” (Machi)

These comments are a significant indictment of the organization of the induction programmes. NETs were critical of the timing of the induction programmes, the merits of the programmes were disregarded due to their poor timing. As some studies indicated, knowledge of the host culture in the pre-departure stage was positively related to general adjustment (Black, 1988; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002a). Although there is little discussion in literature on the appropriate training time for expatriates, given the findings of previous research and this study, it seems unwise to organize training programmes only, or largely months after the arrival of the NETs, or expatriates, in a new cultural environment, and out of administrative convenience.

Further, the EDB seems to take the training programmes as routine activities instead of focusing on the genuine needs of the NETs. It operates a ‘one size fits all’ approach to training programmes, and this is clearly the opposite of what is required, as the experience of the NETS confirms that they have *individual* needs, profiles of adjustment that change over time, indicating that there is a need for an *ongoing* support and training service to be provided for NETs rather than a single, ‘one-off’ induction (that, in the event was badly timed).

In this research, about two-thirds of the NETs attended the EDB induction programmes. However, there was no strong evidence from their comments to indicate that having participated in the programmes had enhanced their knowledge about, and skills for working in, the new culture. For example, they indicated their surprise in finding a range of unexpected matters in their work and daily lives, such as the low abilities of their students, the textbook focused teaching approach, the dictatorial leadership of the school principals, and the impolite staring or rudeness of the locals towards them. This may

suggest that the content of the induction should be thoroughly reviewed taking into accounts of perspectives of the NETs so as to make meaningful improvements. Some NETs did mention that there was a sharing session from experienced local and expatriate teachers about the Hong Kong and classroom situations. However, these were apparently not enough to prepare them for the real world situation when they stepped into the classrooms.

### *Recommendation*

It is suggested that the EDB should take note of the opinion of the NETs when organizing training programmes for NETs in future. Induction should be arranged for all NETs before their arrival, immediately upon their arrival in Hong Kong and before they start their teaching in schools. The findings also imply that training should be arranged in batches and several times when schools are to start and throughout the period of the sojourn. The training is meant to give them useful information about the social and work lives in Hong Kong, including the social and work cultures, so that they can form accurate expectation of the situations. Through attending the training, NETs will also be able to establish a network of support as soon as possible.

There must be more efforts in improving the contents of the induction and ongoing support. Tomalin (2009) s that there are four phases in the learning cycle: activity, bebrief, conclusion and implementation and stressed that the activity phase is very important. “Intercultural training is first and foremost a knowledge-based topic...it is also a topic that invites reflection and consideration of one’s own mindset and one’s own practice” (Tomalin, 2009: 116). Perhaps the principle underlying the Intercultural Competence for Professional Mobility (ICOPROMO) project may provide more ideas to increase the effectiveness in the design of the induction programme. It stated that experience “is not a sufficient, even though necessary, condition for interculturality. There must also be reflection, analysis and action” (Alred *et al.*, 2003: 1-5). With their successful use of the discussion of “critical incident” and the “role-play” technique, they affirmed the belief that “the use of more crafted, stylized, theatrical devices which come closer to exploring human situations more realistically and in depth” could help “enter a world which is [therefore] objectified and subject to scrutiny” (Fleming, 2003: 98). NETs should be

encouraged to become involved in the induction programme activities by role-playing, thinking about and analyzing situations before responding, so that they can apply their interpretations, suggestions, previous experiences and creativity in dealing with novel cultural situations.

Guilherme *et al.* (2009) also cautioned that as culture-specific competence must be situated in contextual and temporal terms that are easily translated into “formulas” that are limited-in-scope (Rathje, 2007: 257-258), trainers of induction programme might at best provide the NETs with real life examples that can “stimulate reflection on the motives and the meanderings of intercultural interaction” (Guilherme *et al.*, 2009: 208) in order to allow the NETs to become familiarized with situations they might encounter and hence got prepared to handle those situations. Byram (2003) advocates the need to raise awareness of multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural issues since “acting interculturally involves a level of analytical awareness that does not necessarily follow from being bicultural” (Byram, 2003: 64-65).

Moreover, besides training, coaching may also be important in helping NETs’ cultural adjustment. “Good intercultural training will have both a training and a coaching aspect” (Tomalin, 2009: 117). Coaching is more personal in that the coacher will identify the issues of concerns to the trainee and provide focused advice for him/her to handle the real life situations. Given the comments about the individual nature and variability of cross-cultural adjustment, this is considered to be an important recommendation.

It is also interesting to note that while those who have attended the inductions were not thoroughly equipped with the knowledge and skills to meet the challenges of the new culture, these NETs, together with those who had not attended the induction, were all able to demonstrate varying degrees of adjustment to the new cultural environment. As indicated in the core category, the flexibility they had demonstrated was important for them to achieve success in the adjustment as it indicates their willingness and openness to change themselves. “Organizations and individuals who perceive the needs for intercultural knowledge and skills and take initiatives to develop them on their own may become interculturally competent to meet challenges in the changing circumstances” (Feng, 2009: 72). Kramsch (1993) states that the opportunities for transformation are

embedded in cultures in contact. To enhance the effectiveness of the induction programme and to enrich the programme content, there may be some lecturing on the psychology of sojourners and counseling that encourages and emphasizes the importance of holding appropriate and practicable attitudes in cross-cultural adjustment.

## **6.4.2 Advice for prospective NETs**

### *6.4.2.1 Having the right attitude*

The NETs made some useful suggestions for prospective teachers who may be interested in taking up teaching jobs in Hong Kong. Firstly, the participants suggested that it was imperative to have the “right” attitudes before setting out on this exciting journey. These included staying positive, being ready for the change, being willing to observe and learn, being open and flexible, having a sense of humour, and trying to respect and accept the local culture and practice.

“I think everything depends on your attitude. . . . I think I have a positive influence. . . . we are ready to go, we are willing. . . . I want the cultural exchange. . . . –be flexible. The attitude of willing to learn, and willing to try new ideas.” (Daniel)

“When you go to different countries, you’re always learning, don’t go with previous learnt ideas. . . . You can always walk away if things are not working.” (Jacky)

“I like Chinese culture. . . . I’m quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt. . . . I should appreciate what I have got.” (Nancy)

“I myself was a cheerful person, I didn’t like to let my feeling down. . . . be positive. . . . be open to learn more and know more. . . . be willing to learn their culture, and want to share your culture with them. . . . Take everything as it is here, don’t try to change anything. Maybe try to change yourself.” (Trudy)

“Look at everything and laugh, you have to look at it as a humour, something to laugh at, a learning experience, or just something you observe. . . . Be positive, enjoy being here.” (Donna)

“I still find some things frustrating, but I find it kind of funny, so the things that used to irritate me now make me laugh. . . . just accept it and grow with it, 'cause everything turns out in the end.” (Machi)

The NETs indicated that they “like”, “want” and “are willing”. As mentioned, research indicate that positive personality traits such as openness, flexibility, willingness to communicate, positive affectivity, and showing tolerance, etc., have strong positive effects on the facets of adjustment (Black, 1990; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Selmer, 2001b; Selmer, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002a). The experiences of the NETs lends additional evidence to support the claim that possessing positive attitudes may facilitate expatriates’ adjustment.

#### *6.4.2.2 Engage the support of family and friends*

The NETs remarked that it was important to have the support of family and friends. For those not staying with families, they found it particularly important to make more friends, both local and non-local, in order to obtain practical or emotional support to handle issues related to their daily living or their work.

“I have one of the better NET experiences of living in Hong Kong, because I’ve got my 姐姐(aunty) and my cousins here. I’m working in a Christian school, everyone is really nice. I really enjoy it . . . .make friends, make local friends, make international friends.” (Donna)

“When my husband came, things totally changed with his positive attitude. My view of Hong Kong changed. . . . after that, my brother came to visit me with his family. . . . And I must say I’m quite lucky to have very nice colleagues, very close friends.” (Trudy)

“I think in HK you spend most of your life working unfortunately. Really needs to keep a good relationship with your colleagues. If you’re miserable at work, you’ll be miserable at home.” (Nancy)

“The NET programme sent me a list of email addresses of current NETs. I sent out an email to the people on the list. I got two people, who’ve become my best friends till now. With these people from England, they knew my cultural background and what I need to know and answer all my questions. . . . In my first year, I had support from my panel chair and the principal. They backed me up.” (Jacky)

“I have a core group of friends and I’m really enjoying. Everything is going perfectly, perfectly. . . . I met a bunch of new people that became very good friends. . . . My principal is very supportive, understanding, the teachers are really well. I am really lucky.” (Machi)

NETs found friends to be important in providing practical and emotional support. For example, friends from schools provide information on daily matters like setting up bank accounts and the internet, and where to buy daily necessities such as needles and threads, they could also offer advice and support to their work. Having friends of similar cultures also help as they be more understanding of each others’ experience as Raymond said, “having western teaching friends to communicate with, complain with, socialize with, definitely help, because we have the same mind, same background, same culture, same perceptions.”

Research indicated that relational skills have strong effects on general and interaction adjustment (e.g., Black, 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Kealey, 1989; Black & Gregersen, 1991a; Gregersen & Black, 1992; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Selmer, 1999; 2001; Caligiuri, 2000b). Social support has been viewed as an important factor in predicting both psychological adjustment (Fontain, 1986; Adelman, 1988) and physical health (Schwarzer *et al.*, 1994) during cross-cultural transitions. Its absence is associated with the increased probability of physical and mental illness during cross-cultural sojourns (Hammer, 1987). Having friends who are members of the dominant or host culture has been associated with a decrease in psychological problems in immigrants (Furham and Li, 1993).

Satisfaction with host national relationships has been positively related to psychological well-being in sojourners (Klineblerg and Hull, 1979; Searle and Ward, 1990; Stone *et al.*,

1990; Ward and Kennedy, 1993a). Weaver (1993) found that those who developed a minimum of one friendship with a host national came out of the sharp downturn frequently encountered in the U-curve assimilation process. Findings from this research and previous studies affirm the significance of social support in the cross-cultural transitions. As the NETs' comments indicate, social support received provides information and extra resources to reduce uncertainty and hence increase their satisfaction with their lives and work (Black, 1990). It may also help take away the feeling of loneliness and isolation, symptoms that may be experienced as culture shock by sojourners in a new cultural environment.

#### *6.4.2.3 Acquire relevant experiences and appropriate expectations*

The NETs in this study pointed out that it is important to acquire relevant experiences and appropriate expectations. While the NETs were not given a choice of the schools in which they would teach, there was a strong likelihood of a NET being assigned to a school with low ability students, what the NETs described as "shit schools". Hence, the prospective NETs should be psychologically prepared for this situation. It is therefore desirable that he or she has acquired some teaching experiences back home or elsewhere before taking up this challenging job in Hong Kong and that they are given fair information about this before they sign any contract, for informed consent to operate: an ethical matter. In addition, many NETs indicated that they had no ideas on how to handle students' disciplinary problems when they first arrived, particularly when it seemed that schools would not provide adequate advice and practical support and training for NETs to deal with the student disciplinary matters.

"I had a basic understanding of the Asian culture, I think, how would a 26 year old Net, who has never been to another country, who didn't have friends here, how would they cope? It would be very difficult, especially if you got in a shit school. You'll really freak out." (Machi)

"So I would say to that person, be sure you have some experiences, because you'll be like a double shock if you just come in with no experience, and some NETs have been hired and are working with no previous experience." (Raymond)



“I thought the English level was quite high from the people I met, the people in hotels and restaurants. In my school, lots of students have no English or poor English, so that’s quite surprising. I didn’t expect that when I came to HK.” (Johnny)

Literature mentioned the importance of having knowledge and understanding of a host country before moving there. Some research indicated that having realistic expectations facilitated adjustment (Averill, 1973; Hawes and Kealy, 1981) and highlighted the positive effects of providing realistic and accurate information before the occurrence of stress-provoking experiences (MacDonald and Kaiper, 1983; Weissman and Furnham, 1987). The NETs found it stressful to teach low ability students who lacked learning motivation. They observed that even some local teachers had broken down because they did not know how to handle ill-disciplined students. For them, the situation was “unexpected”, “difficult to deal with” and “exhausting”, particularly during the initial period of adjustment in Hong Kong. They even commented that having to deal with unmotivated low ability students was “a waste of the NETs’ time and government’s resources.”

Therefore acquiring practical teaching experiences and adopting a realistic expectation of the teaching and learning situations in Hong Kong will be helpful for NETs to adjust to their work. The major implication is to make clear to the NETs about the workplace environment, culture and practice of the school system in Hong Kong to help NETs in formulating a realistic expectation of their work lives in Hong Kong. It is important to make clear to the NETs the situation in which they may find themselves and the support structures and networks available to them.

Another suggestion for the NETs is the need for better coordination and communication between the Education Bureau (EDB) and the school that will employ the NET and to ensure standardization of procedures of induction and support. “Standardized everything. Oh, like so many people, sitting in another country for months, no information. . . . But there’s a big mess between the school and the EDB”, said Machi. Most NETs mentioned having to take care of most of the things themselves, such as looking for accommodation and opening bank accounts immediately on their arrival. Daniel was among the lucky few whose school had arranged to pick up the NETs from the airport and provided

comprehensive information and assistance to help them settle down, such as helping them to find accommodation.

Therefore, if the procedure for reception or types of information and assistance provided by schools to NETs can be standardized (and brought up to an improved standard), maybe many of the “disastrous” experiences that NETs would encounter may be avoided, as Machi pointed out. Little research has been conducted to investigate whether better communication between the expatriates and the employing institutions will facilitate expatriates’ adjustment. This may be another aspect for future research.

## **6.5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

As with other qualitative research study, this research on the adjustment experiences and responses of the native-speaking English teachers in Hong Kong has several strengths and weaknesses, and these are discussed below.

### **6.5.1 Strengths of the research**

Firstly, this in-depth research provides a comprehensive picture of the cross-cultural experiences in Hong Kong of nine native-speaking English teachers (NETs). By using the participants’ words in the data analysis, together with the tools of the grounded theory, the thesis tested the theory of cross-cultural adjustment which represents an actual portrayal of their experiences. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the typed interviews were sent to each participant for verification and correction (respondent validation) in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data by means of member checking. This study represents an honest interpretation of the lives, experiences, responses of the NETs.

A qualitative approach was adopted due to the nature of the research problem/issue that was presented in the dissertation. This researcher consistently sought the advice of experienced scholars in qualitative methodologies to help her devise and implement this study. Attempts were made to read widely about the qualitative methodologies. Several works, including Denzin (1978), Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1998) to design, implement and evaluate the proposed study to ensure

that the selected methodology and data analysis processes were based on the precepts devised by the authors, as far as possible.

Moreover, as the researcher was a local Hong Konger who was not working in the teaching profession, the researcher knew none of the NET participants before the research commenced. The researcher observed clearly that her role was to explain in detail to each participant prior to the initial interview the purpose and objective of the research, and steps were taken to ensure confidentiality so that the participants would feel comfortable and free to share their feelings and views. The friendly and disinterested/neutral position of the researcher facilitated honest and open dialogues and allowed unbiased interpretations of interviewees' thoughts and feelings.

Thirdly, this study offers insights into the adjustment experiences of NETs in Hong Kong, the cultural differences they had encountered and how they had responded to these. The research shows that NETs realize differences in many aspects in their work and life, including the physical environment, the educational system, the people and their values. It is also noted that some similarities among cultures were observed by the NETs in their exposure to new cultures, highlighting the complex nature of cross-cultural contacts in the era of globalization. So a major implication here is that it may be fruitless to stereotype responses or to try to create typologies of responses.

Fourthly, the findings show that there are wide variations in the degree, mode, and patterns of adjustment of the expatriates in a different culture. The research also identifies various factors that may contribute to the success or failure of the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs, which may have implications on the adjustment of expatriates in general.

As globalization intensifies in the 21st century, the workforce has many more opportunities to work with people of diverse cultures. As a consequence of these changes in the global economy, businesses, including education, are increasingly relying on expatriate assignments to facilitate the globalization process (Tung, 1987; Ronen, 1989; Scullion, 1991). Results of cross-cultural contacts can be very complex. As mentioned, despite the significant resources committed to promoting the NET scheme, only a few studies have been conducted in Hong Kong on the NET scheme but none of them focused

on examining the cross-cultural experience and responses of the NETs in the face of cultural changes. While there is extensive research investigating intercultural adaptation in western countries, particularly in the United States, there are comparatively fewer studies investigating the adaptation of westerners in Asian countries. For western expatriates, China, particularly the more internationalized and developed places such as Hong Kong, is becoming an increasingly relevant choice of destination for international assignment. This study hopes to add to that small cadre of research. The research added to the limited discussion of the expatriates' adjustment in Asian cities and demonstrated the need for further research. This study was just the tip of the iceberg, and more needs to be done in order to understand the complexity of the phenomenon.

Further, the study was beneficial to the participants themselves. Before or after the interviews, each of the NETs commented that the conversation gave them an opportunity to take stock of their experiences in Hong Kong. No one had asked them about their experiences in such an in-depth manner. The interview process allowed them to reflect on areas of their lives and experiences they never really took time to think about. Their comments addressed information they might have forgotten or seldom shared with friends. Hence the interviewees were open and excited to share views and experiences with the interviewer in the study. Some of them agreed that the process had helped them to look back on their experiences more objectively and they hoped that the findings would shed more light on the experiences, difficulties, struggles, happiness and sadness of the professional group of expatriate teachers in Hong Kong and that the community, the schools and the government could review the situations and the needs of the NETs seriously to obtain some insights to improve the scheme.

As the researcher tried her best to remain neutral and consistent throughout the interviews, this process made the researcher see the meaning and importance of the study to the NETs, despite its small scale. It delved into the lives of the NETs that have never been considered in depth by the educational sector and the government although very significant amounts of resources had been committed to implementing the scheme.

The research also indicated the complexity of cross-cultural adjustment, such that meta-theories may not apply well, and that person-centred and multiple theoretical explanations

of the processes of cross-cultural adjustment might be more useful in explaining the issues in, and processes of, cross-cultural adjustment of NETs in Hong Kong. That said, the thesis argued, and defended, the importance of addressing issues of cross-cultural adjustment in explaining attrition rates and helping to reduce them in the NETs scheme in Hong Kong, i.e. it argued that an understanding and addressing of issues in cross-cultural adjustment was an important contributor to the reduction of cross-cultural adjustment in Hong Kong NETs. The thesis argued that cross-cultural adjustment and accommodation was a two-way matter, applying to the host culture, schools and the Hong Kong government's education department as well as simply to the sojourner.

Finally, a major claim of the thesis is to have identified where interventions could be made to improve the situation of the NETs and the NETs scheme overall, targeting the need for careful preparation, induction, and ongoing personal support services for NETs, social networking, and the role of the government's education department in this. Such recommendations constitute a major policy change for the Hong Kong government, as it suggests that the support that it provides for NETs has to move beyond simply being administrative, 'one-off' and generalized/'one-size-fits-all' to being human, ongoing and individualized.

Having said that, given the limited scope of this study, the paper could constitute a pre-pilot for a more extensive survey to be done in Hong Kong. It raises issues that could be further explored in a large-scale research.

### **6.5.2 Limitations of the research**

There are several limitations to this study. Firstly, due to limited time and budget, the study can only examine NETs who were willing to participate in the research. Most of them indicated their intention to stay and work in this city despite their diverse experiences and feelings. Many of their comments were on the positive side, as they found their lives or work endurable or enjoyable in Hong Kong, otherwise they may have already joined the exodus groups who had left before, or upon the expiry of their contracts. There is no way to know if the same sets of themes and categories would have emerged if interviews had been conducted with the NETs who had determined to leave after their contracts expired or who had left the profession or Hong Kong; this research only reached

NETs who were currently working in Hong Kong. It would be helpful if in-depth interviews could also be conducted for NETs who have switched to other professions or departed from Hong Kong, so as to understand more about the other sides of the stories, such as the reasons for them leaving Hong Kong, the duration of their stay before they departed, the impact of the experiences on them, their views on the NET scheme, whether they had taken up, or were going to take up, other overseas assignments. The information gathered can be compared with results of this research.

Moreover, the comments of the NETs were based on their own recollections, and, though the interviews were conducted whilst the NETs were still working, some earlier incidents or facts they considered insignificant may have been forgotten subconsciously; this is a one of the common limitations of gathering data through interviews (Bryman, 1988). The data are records of their memories, that may not have captured the fact comprehensively or correctly. However, in view of the scale of this research, it was not feasible to verify their comments with those who knew them, such as their colleagues and supervisors, friends, family and relatives. In future research, participants may be invited to keep diaries or produce letters, emails or other documents to provide additional source of data to enable more objective investigation of the questions. These written materials could either be the primary source of data or be used as supplementary data (Bryman, 2001). Those who have close interactions with the NETs, such as their family members, colleagues and good friends, may be interviewed to provide triangulated sources of evidence for the research.

It was mentioned earlier that the sample was purposive, but limited to one set of players in the cross-cultural adjustment scene, and that interview data were collected on a 'one-shot' basis, i.e. at one point in time only. Given the comments made earlier, that cross-cultural adjustment changes over time, it would be important for further research to adopt a longitudinal framework, tracking participants over time, to see changes in their cross-cultural adjustment and the reasons for this. Further, it would be important to gather the views of other players in the situation, for example the schools, the teachers, the principals, the EDB, the families and friends of the NETs.

Due to the specificity of this sample and study, the findings may not necessarily be generalized to the larger population of the NETs. Having said that, by studying the lives of nine native-speaking English teachers in Hong Kong using qualitative methods, the researcher was able to acquire deep, saturated understanding of their diverse experiences and responses to the cultural changes in a developed international Asian city at one point in time. Any other sample may produce different findings; however, some research cited in Chapter 2 did find similar experiences of expatriates in other professions and working avenues. The results found here could be applied to expatriates more widely, thus supporting the possible transferability of the study.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

In view of the high attrition rate of the NET Scheme in Hong Kong, the government has provide financial incentives to address the problem, yet, despite the effort, only a slight improvement has been observed. Many reasons could account for the perceived ineffectiveness of the NET scheme to recruit and retain NETs, which could not be solved simply by financial concerns. This thesis suggests that one of the issues the government has to further investigate may be the cross-cultural adjustment of NETs in Hong Kong. This thesis investigates the cross-cultural adjustments of the NETs in Hong Kong and their responses in culturally different environment from their native environment, so that insights can be gained on the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs to serve as a focus for a more comprehensive review of the NET Scheme in the future, for the improvement of its effectiveness (including its cost-effectiveness) for the benefits of both teachers and students.

A literature review suggested that the following issues need to be explored in the empirical investigation that followed: the conception of culture and its relevance to this age of globalization, the types of immigrants, culture, being a multi-dimensional concept and the source of many cultural confusion, conflicts, misunderstandings and frustration; understanding the types of migrants and the various dimensions of cross-cultural contact; a range of psychological theories of cross-cultural adjustment that complement each other; outcomes of cross-cultural contact that underlines the significance of NETs having

accurate perceptions of the situation; responses to cross-cultural contact and the factors that may affect the results. Lastly, the concept of intercultural competence is also seen to have an influence on cross-cultural adjustment, and the argument has suggested that this can be prepared for in advance of the sojourner's taking up a post but that it is also important to provide ongoing and differential, individualized support once a sojourner is in post.

This research addressed the five research questions by employing a qualitative study on selected NETs in Hong Kong. There is limited research on the cross-cultural experiences of cross-cultural professionals in Asian countries. In order to address this, this research utilized a qualitative approach together with several aspects of the tools of grounded theory to explore the experiences of this group of professionals and the ways in which they responded to the changes in a culturally different Asian environment.

After completing individual interviews with nine native-speaking English teachers (NETs), one core category and four key categories emerged from the sharing of these teachers. Following a review of the profiles of the nine participants, discussion was provided of the four key categories that emerged using the tools of grounded theory and qualitative data analysis – coding, axial coding, constant comparison, theoretical saturation, core categories, content analysis – and the relevance of the findings related to the literature. A comprehensive view emerged of the cross-cultural experiences of the NETs in Hong Kong and the ways they coped with a different culture, and this lends itself well to the testing of the hypothesis set out in the opening of the thesis, that cross-cultural adjustment was a significant feature of the experiences of the NETs in Hong Kong, and could contribute to the retention and attrition rates reported in chapter one.

The core category identified from the data was named '*responding to cultural changes with flexibility and achieving self- enhancement and transformation*', whilst the four key categories were: (a) learning the alien culture: differences and similarities; (b) adopting multi-flexible approaches in face of cultural differences; (c) experiencing self enhancement and transformation; and (d) factors that may affect the process and outcomes of cross-cultural contacts.



The data showed that the experiences and outcomes of cultural contact for the NETs varied. These differences could be explained by a number of factors as mentioned above. As indicated in the core category, flexibility is a key that underscores the cross-cultural experiences of all the NETs.

The findings show that culture was used by expatriates as a perceptual framework in making sense of the world and, in turn, informed choices about particular behavior. It also affirms that expatriates observed different aspects of cross-cultural adjustment – mainly social and work-related. Not all NETs conceived themselves to have experienced culture shock in the adjustment process. And the pattern of their adjustment varied, e.g. from linear to U-curved. However, those who had experienced culture shock experienced the phenomenon in different facets of adjustment.

One major finding was that, for NETs, one of the commonest problems they encountered in Hong Kong was multi-level marginalization, i.e. the EDB did not give adequate preparation, NETs were put out in remote schools, and when they arrived in the schools the resident staff marginalized them. They were treated as outsiders rather than as partners, i.e. the host culture seemed reluctant to change itself and expected the NETs to be the only parties to change. The differences and similarities as perceived by the NETs were identified. It was also found that NETs adopted various modes of adjustment, they may assimilate, separate, integrate, marginalize, but more often they would adopt mixed modes of adjustment, namely ‘mode of cultural hybridity’.

It was also observed that NETs tended to employ problem-focused coping when they felt that something constructive could be done. Although most stressors elicited two types of coping (problem-solving and emotion-focused), problem-focused coping tended to predominate when NETs felt that something constructive could be done, whereas emotion-focused coping tended to predominate when they felt that the situation must be endured. NETs employed a mixed range of strategies in coping with the changes, differences or barriers. Again flexibility was a salient feature of their responses.

A multitude of factors were identified to have affected the responses of the NETs, including attitude, age, marital status, personal cultural background, perceived cultural distance, culture-related skills and knowledge.

The implications of this thesis for practice, theory and research have been discussed above. It is hoped that the discussions and recommendations would serve as useful reference and this thesis can serve as a pilot study on which a large-scale survey can be conducted on the cross-cultural adjustment of the NETs to investigate the problems of the scheme, notably the high attrition rate of NETs, and that helpful and practical suggestions can be made to the government to improve the expensive scheme for the benefits of the students and schools in Hong Kong.

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**EXAMPLE CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

**CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN HONG KONG: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY**

(The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself)

*Please cross out as necessary*

Have you read the letter of introduction to the study? YES / NO

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study? YES / NO

Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions? YES / NO

Have you received enough information about the study? YES / NO

Have you been informed that the interview will be recorded and intended use of the recordings? YES / NO

Do you consent to the use of the recordings for the desired purpose of the study? YES / NO

Who have you spoken to? Ms Chu Chau Kan

Do you consent to participate in the study? YES / NO

Do you understand that you are free to accept or withdraw from the study at any time? YES / NO

**Signed** ..... **Date** .....

**(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS)** .....

**Approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee**

**CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF NATIVE ENGLISH TEACHERS IN  
HONG KONG: AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY**

**Interview Guide**

**A. Interview Questions and Potential Probes**

**2. Opening questions/discussion**

How long have you been living and teaching in Hong Kong? What have drive you to come to teach in Hong Kong?

**3. Grand tour question (possible probes may be used to echo the interviewee's words)**

- a. What is it like to live and work in a cultural environment different from that of your own native country?

*Possible probes:*

*How do you feel after you arrived in Hong Kong?*

*What do you like best about Hong Kong and what are the things you most dislike about this city?*

*Are your feelings towards the people and things here changing with time?*

- b. Can you tell me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you arrived in Hong Kong?

*Possible probes:*

*Are the situations what you have expected or anticipated before you came?*

*Are the differences changing with time?*

- c. How would you normally respond or what would you normally do when you encounter changes such as those you've mentioned above?

*Possible probes:*

*What are the possible factors that have caused your reactions?*

*Do you think you are successful in handling these differences?*

*Why?*

*In what ways do you think you have changed ever since you have come to live and teach in Hong Kong?*

*Will you continue or adjust your responses in the remaining time you will live here and why?*

*Will you consider yourself comfortably adjusted to the culture in Hong Kong now?*

- d. What suggestions will you have for the schools in Hong Kong to help make it easier for the NETs to adjust to the living and working environments in Hong

Kong?

*Possible probes:*

*According to your own experience from the moment before you arrive?*

*Or between the time when you arrive in Hong Kong till you start working at school?*

*How about after you formally start working at school?*

*How do you find the induction programme?*

- e. What suggestions will you have for the government and schools to improve the NET scheme?

*Possible probes:*

*Government instructions and assistance to NETs and schools?*

*School support to NETs?*

*Communication between NETs, schools and government?*

- f. What advice will you have for the native English teachers to be before they come to live and work in Hong Kong?

*Possible probes:*

*Information & knowledge about Hong Kong?*

*Any visits to Hong Kong before and what did you do then?*

*Were there big surprises or differences & in what aspects?*

- g. Overall, do you enjoy your experiences here in Hong Kong? If you have the opportunity to choose again, will you opt to come to Hong Kong? Do you intend to stay longer?

*Possible probes:*

*How would you describe your experiences here?*

*Did you find your daily life manageable?*

*Do you find your work manageable?*

*Are you able to make many friends?*

#### **4. Closing question**

What other things would you like to tell me about your experiences here and the ways you have handled the changes? Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

6 February 2008

Interview with Nancy

(I: Ivory; N: Nancy)

I: Can you tell me what have driven you to HK?

N: I married to my husband in HK.

I: How did you feel about living and working in HK?

N: I like HK, probably going to spend the rest of my life here. I think teaching is fun, but the working hour is very long and tiring, that is a very difficult thing, it's too busy in HK.

I: What're your expectations of HK before you came?

N: Before I came, I came on holidays three times before, so I kind of knew how HK was like before, but I didn't realize that working here is so demanding.

I: How were your expectations different from your experiences?

N: I think the most difficult thing is working long hours, over 40 hrs per week because I also worked part-time as well. The cultural things are also different. For example meeting people and making friends are different. Maybe people here are not so open, so difficult to make friends. Maybe we have different thinking.

I: How?

N: (pause and think) Just general topics of conversations are not so open, people are more conservative here. For example, in a western country if you go somewhere you can just say hello to strangers, and you can talk to them and make a friend, so here if you talk to strangers, people will think you are weird. So, difficult to make friends.

I: Do you have a circle of local or western friends.

N: Most of my friends are not local, they are Asians, but they are not from HK, my best friend is Japanese, my other friend is Japanese.

I: How do you come to make friends with them?

N: Through work.

I: You've been in HK for 2.5 years. What are the things you like best or dislike most about HK?

N: What I like most is the food, the lifestyle, everything is open late. After work, in Australia, if you went home, all the shops were closed, it's very quiet. There's always something you can do. And there are many different things you can see, the food, fashion, many things, many entertainments here. What I dislike most will be sometimes people are impolite. Maybe because I'm western, they cheat me a lot. If I go to a shop, they'll give me the wrong size, or try to charge me more money. I've learnt some of the prizes now, so I know if they're cheating me or not. That's the biggest thing I don't like. And I know because I'm a

foreigner.

I: What's it like working here?

N: At my work, my school and my colleagues are really nice. At my work, I feel comfortable. Everyone is lovely, the teachers treat me nicely, everyone is lovely. I heard that in other schools the NETs are often isolated. But I am lucky in my school, I got treated very nicely. But in general, when I go somewhere, I have to be very careful. Like the beauty saloon, or a shop, if I want to buy anything, I am very worried about the price. I think sometimes they treat me differently, maybe they think I'm on holidays, that's why.

I: Do you feel comfortable living in a local area like Lai Chi Kok?

N: Yes, I do actually, because I like Chinese culture. I love Chinese food. Because my husband is Chinese, he's very Chinese (laugh). So I'm quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt.

I: Before you came, did you have any ideas of how Chinese culture was like?

N: Most of my best friends are Chinese in Australia, I've a lot of contact of Chinese culture.

I: Are the Chinese culture in HK similar to what you've experienced in Australia?

N: In some ways it's similar, maybe my friends are more westernized in Australia. They follow the western culture too. Here, it's very Chinese.

I: Do you have any examples?

N: (Pause and think) Maybe the way of thinking. I notice that people here seldom openly to express their feelings. If they're angry or if they're sad, they will not express their feelings. In western culture, if you're angry or if you're sad, you will tell them. So sometimes here it's difficult to read my friends' mind, I don't know what to say to them, and I don't know how they think about me. Sometimes in my work, no one says anything, they won't say I'm doing anything bad, they won't say I'm doing anything good. But I heard that if your boss doesn't complain then you're doing a good job, is that right? But in western culture, they will tell you you're doing a good job, they'll also tell you you're doing a bad job.

I: Can you share with me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you come to live in HK?

N: The long working hour, maybe that is the major difference. Definitely the food, of course. I like Asian food better, I like the flavour.

I: Normally what your responses will be in face of the differences?

N: Sometimes I feel frustrated or a bit lonely here. OK and sad, sometimes I miss the friendliness of my friends back in Australia, sometimes I feel a bit isolated, especially when I am treated badly.

I: You mean you have experiences of being treated badly here?

N: Many many times. Mainly if I asked for something and I asked for size small, they'd cheat me and give me a size large, or they'll charge me more money; maybe they have an advertisement, one day I went to a hair saloon and they sent me the bill, my Chinese friend translated to me, and



they charged me 300 dollars more.

I: Do you think the situation becomes better or worse?

N: The first year was most difficult because I didn't know how to get around. Sometimes I was afraid to walk around by myself because people would stare at me a lot. That was very difficult. Now, if people look at me, I'll just ignore them. I don't mind now. But when I first came here, I was really shy, and then sometimes I found the language barrier quite difficult. Sometimes when I go somewhere and I can't understand the menu, and they can't read English and I don't know what to order, so it's difficult to find food. But now, it's getting better. Maybe I'm getting more adapted to the culture here, maybe now I can speak a little bit Chinese, if I really need to, I can. I know the prizes, the things, I know where to go, for example, I know which restaurants to go to, which shops to go that speak English. In the beginning, I was lost, I got no idea. My husband was working long hours, he couldn't really look after me.

I: What were the factors that help you go through the difficult period?

N: (pause and think) I guess being strong-willed, and many trials and errors. Maybe I've become stronger, more independent, I've made some friends here, who are more supportive, which is good, but during my first year, I didn't have many friends, and my husband's friends couldn't speak any English, so that's quite difficult for me. Now I have friends who can speak good English, so that's good. I guess my colleagues at work have been very supportive. They help me a lot. For example, if I need a new microphone for work, they'll help me buy one. If I need something, such as a needle and thread to sew something, I don't know where to look for it in HK, they will help me, which is very nice.

I: How do you find the children and teaching here?

N: Actually I love it. Maybe my school, I heard that my school is a little bit different from other schools. The children, their English ability is not very good, they're band 3, but they're lovely, I love them (laugh). Even though their English is not good, they'll come out try and speak to me, I'll play with them and have a joke with them, yea, I'll laugh at them, yea, I love them, they're my baby.

I: Do you think you're successful in handling this cultural adaptation?

N: I think yes (laugh). At the very beginning, I didn't think I could. I had homesick and I wanted to go back Australia. There are times now sometimes I still feel a little bit depressed, and I feel like going home, but then I think I've made a big move, I've made friends here, I've got a nice job, and I've got a nice husband, I should appreciate what I have got. And I guess if I learn more Chinese, my life will be even better.

I: Do you have any plan to learn Cantonese?

N: Because my husband is from Hong Kong, he can teach me. But we don't see each other very often. We work late and I wake up early in the morning. The only time we see each other is Saturday night and Sunday, quite hard. When we see each other, we just want to talk. We don't really

want to learn language. But I think I pick up a lot from my children. I see them every day. Sometimes they try to teach me in Chinese. That's the main thing, that I'm going to learn Chinese from my children, especially the younger ones, they're funny. They think it's interesting when I speak Chinese, maybe my accent is funny.

I: In what ways you think you have changed after living and working here for some time?

N: (Pause and think) I've definitely become more independent and more responsible. I learn to look after myself. Maybe I've adapted also to Chinese culture, maybe my thinking is more like the local Chinese here compared to a westerner. Maybe my action, maybe I am not as open as I was before (laugh), maybe my style because I like local clothing. When eating out, I would eat Asian food. When my friends from Australia came, and then walking along the street, all wearing very sexy clothing, maybe I've become more conservative, I think I wouldn't do that now, which is quite different. Now I prefer to go to Chinese restaurant. I celebrate the Chinese festivals like Chinese new year, the mid-Autumn Festival. And I like the karaoke (laugh).

I: Do you consider yourself comfortably adapted to the culture here in HK?

N: I think maybe 80%, adapted here. I think when my friend came from Australia, then I can really see the difference. She stayed a week with me, she told me wow you've become so responsible now, I can do a lot of things, my actions are faster, I've got to adapt to the HK lifestyle, I'm always busy, I am always rushing to work, and then doing everything very quickly. My friend came from Australia and her action was very slow.

I: How about the other 20%?

N: I think because I'm a westerner, a part of me will always be westerner, no matter how long I stay in HK, there'll always be that part of me that has western culture that I can't let go of.

I: Do you realize what that part is?

N: Maybe I don't do too much any more, maybe I've been here for a while and I've been trying to fit in the local culture, I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but maybe when I go back to Australia, then I'll release my western culture and then I'll do things that I used to do. Maybe here I don't have many western friends, it's a bit difficult for me. I do have other NET teacher friends, sometimes we do things like have breakfast together, even some western breakfasts, have a coffee, some toasts, we bring each other chocolates like western people do, sometimes we do that together which is good. But not that always, I'm always surrounded by local people.

I: So what will be the first few things you think you'll be doing again if you're in Australia now?

N: (pause and think), I think relaxing (laugh) and going out for coffee, spending three hours at a café, that's what we like to do, just relax. And

maybe we'll go driving together 'cause I had a car in Australia, or drive to the hill and then have a coffee together, or maybe go to my friend's house and then have a barbecue, and maybe my friend will cook dinner, it's difficult to do here so because the houses are so small, and everything is so rush, I can't spend 3 hours at a café.

I: If you have a friend, he or she tells you that he or she wants to live and teach in HK, what will be your advice or suggestions be?

N: I'll say do it. If you don't do it now, I think you'll never do it. I think it's a good learning experience, you'll become stronger, more independent, and more responsible. And if you don't do it when you're young, then you'll never get a chance to do it. Actually my friend told me that he applied for a visa to work here, he's waited for a year and then finally they accepted him, and now he's changed his mind, he doesn't want to come to HK anymore. He said that after staying here for one month, he can't adapt to the busy lifestyle, he went back, he said he couldn't handle that, too far away from his family, he prefers more relaxing lifestyle. It's very stressful here. Yea, that's the biggest difficulty for me. Friends in Australia, we spent a lot of time together, here if I have a lot of friends, we can't spend a lot of time for each other.

I: If your friend did come, what suggestions you would have him to better adapt to the work and life here?

N: I will definitely say he needs to try and make friends with his colleagues. I think in HK you spend most of your life working unfortunately. I think he really needs to keep a good relationship with your colleagues. If you don't have much time at home, if you're miserable at work, you'll be miserable at home. To be able to communicate with them, maybe have lunch together, have breakfast with them together, or even after work, to do something together, otherwise, if you maybe work for a bad boss, your life will be sad. Make more local friends, definitely local friends can help him a lot, definitely, or even western friends, 'cause they can show him around. If you got none, you don't know where to go, it's nearly impossible for a westerner to find things in HK, there're so many shops, there're so many doings, and they're all written in Chinese, just even the little things like a needle or a thread, I have no idea where to buy that. That's the most difficult thing.

I: How about the local language?

N: I think maybe basic words, eating and drinking, numbers, numbers are important. Your home address in Chinese is very important. If you know your destinations in Chinese, and you know the numbers, and basic things, like what food you like, what dresses you like, I think that's all, that's what's necessary. If you want to learn Chinese, that's probably better, I don't think you really need that to survive in HK because many people can speak English.

I: Did you have any cultural training before you came?

N: No. I came three times before and I had friends from HK in Australia. So I

- knew quite a lot about HK from traveling.
- I: What about your school?
- N: Nothing at all. Actually they didn't say much either. We have three NETs at the school. I'm very lucky, they helped me and guided me a lot. And even the local teachers, I guess a lot of them started the same year I started, so we are all new, so we all got to learn and experience together, so that's good.
- I: For a foreigner to live in a different cultural environment, do you think it's necessary to have some kind of cultural training?
- N: I believe if they have any cultural contact with Asian friends in Australia, not Asian people born there, like international students, I think they should, because it's very difficult. If they've been to HK on holidays, maybe it's not so important because they've experienced HK, they should be aware of the culture and what it is really like.
- I: Have you joined the government's induction workshop for the NETs?
- N: No, I've missed it. Besides the NETs in my school have helped me a lot. I've met other NET teachers, they found it difficult at their schools. They found they've been isolated. No one talk to them in the staff room, they have the room by themselves, which I feel very sad about it.
- I: What do you think the school can do to help the NETs adapt better at work?
- N: Maybe treat them with more understanding, for example, we are not used to working overtime. I know it's Chinese culture that many people do, maybe they should respect that these are our working hours. Maybe we need a bit more privacy. We are not Chinese, that we need more rest, because we're not used to the environment, we haven't got enough stamina to work such a long time, they need to be more understanding about that, because we come from working 8 hours a day, no overtime, it's very difficult to adapt to working long hours.
- I: Do you have any channel to reflect your needs to your supervisor or the principal about your difficulties?
- N: Well, our principal is very nice, if I have problems, I can go and speak to him, and he's very kind, also the vice-principal, sometimes I feel extremely exhausted, and he would say, if you need to leave a little bit early, let me know and no problem, so he's quite open-minded and he understands, sometimes I feel very tired and I need a break, he's quite nice.
- I: Overall do you enjoy your experiences here in HK?
- N: Yea, I do. Yea.
- I: Will you continue to teach here?
- N: Yea, I think so, definitely. I love teaching, I love the children, maybe I'm still quite young, I can relate to the students a lot. I like to play with them, especially the younger ones, they're very cute. They're very active, very talkative. Sometimes I feel very exhausted, sometimes they don't have motivation, they don't want to learn, but now I'm in the second year

of my teaching, I've learn how to deal with them, how to understand them, maybe I've become more tolerant, maybe they respect me more. In my first year, I kept yelling yelling yelling, but now I try not to lose my temper, I'm more patient. And I understand that their level is very low. Even if they learn say three words in a lesson, it's better than nothing, at least they've learnt something.

- I: I heard that some NETs found it difficult to just follow the textbooks and syllabi at school, don't you think so?
- N: Well, I make up my own lessons, as long as they coincide with the themes, it's no problem, quite free. Although with the HKCEE that needs to be more structured, and also with the A-level, I have to prepare them for the public exams, and in Form Four, they have the school based assessment, very troublesome. They need to read the books and form group discussions, that's really difficult for them, and very time consuming for me. But besides that with the junior forms, Forms 1 to 3, it's very free, it's flexible.
- I: Since you've married to a local, do you have plan to stay here longer?
- N: Yes, I'll stay here probably forever, I would say. My husband couldn't live in Australia. He's very local, very Chinese. He's been to Australia before, but he found it too boring, and too quiet, he felt lonely there.
- I: May I ask you more on how you deal with the time when you feel lonely and depressed here in HK?
- N: I will talk to my friends in Australia or call my parents. Or maybe just stay home and listen to some music. Or maybe talk to my friends in Australia, I'll feel a lot better. Or I'll talk to my mom. We also have MSN. They visit me as well. I usually go back once a year, back to Australia. Usually three weeks during the summer holiday. It's winter there, very cold. Lately it's been cold in HK, but similar to Australia, I'm quite used to it, better than being hot. I don't like the humidity. I don't like summer here. Ah actually that's very difficult for me. The weather, the climate here is very terrible (laugh). I don't like the humidity, I feel extremely hot. And it really affects my health. I always get a fever in summer. Every three weeks, I'll get a fever for about 2 or 3 days. Nothing I can do, just sleep.
- I: Are there anything else you think you would like to share with me about your experiences here?
- N: (Pause and think) I think that's it.
- I: Thank you so much for your sharing.
- N: You're welcome.

**29 January 2008**

**Interview with Jacky**

**(I: Ivory; J: Jacky)**

I: Can you tell me what have driven you to HK?

J: I needed a job and I came to HK. I saw it in a news ad in Japan.

I: Then, since you were in Japan, why didn't you stay there but chose to go to HK instead?

J: I broke up with my fiancée and so I left my fiancée in Japan, I went back to England. I spent a year in England. Then I used the advertisement which I saw in Japan to apply for the job in HK, I need the money, and I like traveling.

I: How did you feel when you first arrived in HK?

J: Yea, very tired. Because of the ruby world cup, a friend and I, we both went to the watch the ruby club.

I: Did you have any expectation when you came to HK?

J: No. Maybe a bit nervous, I like living here, this is my place to live.

I: Do you find HK very different from England?

J: No, I've not lived in England for a long time. I've lived in Japan, or Africa. My school was in Swaziland.

I: I thought it was Switzerland!

J: No no, a small country in Africa.

I: Do you think if there're any big cultural differences in HK?

J: Japan is a stranger country than HK. I feel that HK is maybe a country in the middle between Japan and England. It's still an Asian country, but a bit different, but it's enough to do with the similarity, maybe because of the British rule, it's not that different.

I: How about your daily living?

J: I live in Tuen Mun, I choose to live in a village house, so, it's ok.

I: Have you experienced what people describe as culture shock?

J: I've done a lot of traveling, I've experienced a lot of different cultures, very difficult to have culture shock for me (laugh).

I: Can you speak or understand the local language?

J: I can speak a few words of Cantonese, but I can understand a lot more. I could speak Japanese, I lived in a very small island, I was the only non-Japanese person in the village. Nobody could speak English, after six months, I was able to pick up the language. Now I've been in HK for four years, I'm hoping that eventually to be able to speak Cantonese.

I: Will there be any inconvenience for you to communicate with people in a local town like Tuen Mun?

J: Here, most of the people can speak a little bit English, so it's OK.

I: Did you attend any induction programme organized by the government or your school after you arrived here?

J: No. I came late. I arrived in November. Because I guess my qualifications may be quite low when compared with other candidates, I did not have the

educational qualification. I didn't get the PGD in Education, I got it in HK now. When they phoned me, it's late October, I said OK and so I arrived in November after the workshop.

I: Did the Education Bureau (EB) or the school provide you any information to help you settle down here?

J: They gave me the handout by the EDB. What I found more helpful was that the NET programme sent me a list of email addresses of current NETs. I sent out an email to 10 or 15 people on the list. I got two people, who've become my best friends till now, they replied me and they gave me a lot of support and information. They're both from England. One of them in Tuen Mun, one has applied for work in Tuen Mun, we normally meet up once a week on Monday and catch up the news. That's probably more useful than any information they gave. With these people from England, they knew my cultural background and what I need to know and answer all my questions.

I: Can you tell me what are the things you like most or dislike most about this city?

J: I like the climate here. It's warmer than England, and not as hot as Africa. Also I like the food here. In HK you have a wide selection of food. I like the sort of entertainment here, you have good theatres and the sports, like in Tuen Mun, you have very cheap movie theatres, 30 dollars only. Also I like the children I teach.

I: What are the things you don't like about HK?

J: I think the bureaucracy. Sometimes you have to fill in a lot of forms, even to get the NET job here, a lot of paper work, it's crazy, yea.

I: Can you recall any experiences that you find very enjoyable or very bad?

J: I enjoy watching the cricket contest here, that's very good. I enjoy the holidays I got here. I've been to Japan, Africa, Florida, I got to UK, Vietnam, Bali, yea, I went to mainland China for one Chinese New Year.

I: Any negative experiences?

J: Yea, sometimes. When I first arrived I had some negative experiences in school while we're getting to know each other, because like learning things from the EDB, they wanted to change the school system, going back from the EDB workshops, I said they should try that, they were reluctant to try, but eventually we found things work, initially there was some friction, but now we got on very well, I've got very good relationship with my colleagues, my school. I've got a lot of control of the English department, usually maybe more powerful than the panel chair.

I: How did you handle these kinds of conflict?

J: In my first year, I had support from my panel chair and the principal. They backed me up. When they changed the panel chair, I was, maybe more powerful than the panel chair. When I do something, I would normally get my way. I made sure that things work. We had good effects on the English of the school, we've been doing very well. We are a village school in Tuen Mun, but we're doing better than the national average. We're in the New Territories, we must be doing something right. If you come to our school,

- our children are not afraid of speaking English.
- I: How did you make these happen?
- J: We got a very good programme. We use puppets a lot. We are writing a whole series of readers. We make stories which are actually interesting, normally the stories in the textbooks are not interesting, which are enjoyable for children to learn, we think of some interesting educational games to play with children. In my first year, I was told to follow the textbooks, I disagreed.
- I: If you have a friend who wants to come to live and teach in HK as well, what advice will you give him or her?
- J: Good idea, yea, come. I think it's easy to get used to. Yea come. Specially like me, I'm single. No problem.
- I: What suggestions would you have for the school to help make the NET adaptation easier?
- J: Maybe, the EdB organized a lot of workshops, some of them are good, some of them are quite useless. But they tried. A lot of the ideas, if the NET goes back to the school, the principal or the English panel may object to. So, maybe the principal and the English panel should go rather than just send the NET. Maybe when they came back, it maybe more easier as they will get more support. Another thing is that schools should treat NETs as real teachers. For example, we do not get the annual evaluations of the teachers at the end of the year.
- I: Would you want to stay in the same school after this one expires?
- J: I like my school. Currently I'm developing the scheme of the readers, which we all think are really really good, including our advisory teacher from the EDB. She encourages us to share the idea with the EDB . We have drama schemes, and also have little sisters reading schemes, students from P5, P6 meet once a week with children from P1, P2, who will report to them. We also invite parents and children, once a fortnight, we'll have 4 or 5 parents, they'll take a small group of children in the classroom. All these exciting things we are doing keep me interested to being here. As soon as I get bored, then I'll leave.
- I: Do you think you'll move to live and work in another country again in the future?
- J: Depends on how the reading scheme is doing? We may get it published. The EDB will be happy to use it, but they may not pay for it. When I get bored of HK, I may go to another country, or go back to the UK.
- I: Besides your job, are there any other things in HK that are still attractive to you?
- J: Mostly the school thing.
- I: What do you think are the factors that help you adapt to a new cultural environment?
- J: I'm lucky. When I was 16, I went to boarding school, an international school, in Swaziland, Africa. My family was long long way away. So during that time in my life, I met with people of different origins from all



over the world, it's quite easy to interact with different types of people. Also, I've been traveling a lot. The experience is when you go to different countries, you're always learning, don't go with previous learnt ideas. Like Japan, it's a strange country, after being there for 2 years, things began to make sense.

I: How about HK?

J: Hong Kong is not that strange, the only thing that's strange is the hygiene. All the HK people are very crazy about hygiene. The only country in the world who is crazy about hygiene. For example, if I pick up the food from the table, you think that's strange, you think it's dirty. You use different chopsticks to pick up the food, even in Japan, they don't do so. The reason why I think is because if you go to China, it's is not that clear and tidy, when the British first came to HK, they thought it was dirty, the local Chinese people thought they should be more tidy because the British thought they were dirty. If you go to a Chinese restaurant, you'll clean the plates and the chopsticks, only in HK, you won't do that in China. I think again it's because when the British first arrived, maybe the tables were not as clean, the British were suspicious. The only thing they could clean the table was the tea. So they started cleaning it with the tea. And now it's become a tradition. Even before the SARS, you're still cleaning the table with tea.

I: Do you think you are comfortably adapted to the HK environment.

J: Yes

I: Do you enjoy your experiences in HK?

J: I think I have more friends in Japan. The NET scheme in HK is more professional. We're doing the JET programme in Japan, it's like we were on holidays the whole time. The schools were not expecting too much. Here in HK, it's much more professional. I enjoy that, I've learned a lot. I took a course from the University of HK, I learnt a lot from that. I first came in with a minimum qualification, to be on the safe time, I got the qualification from the University of HK.

I: Any thing you find living here stressful?

J: Now, not really. In the beginning, it's more frustrating. I had arguments with the panel chair, I had to talk to the principal, and he would talk to the panel chair that you could try that. It's interesting, as a panel chair, he is the one to chair the meetings, he cannot argue only from his point of views. It's my suggestion to the principal to make him the panel chair.

I: if you're given the chance, would you choose to come to HK again?

J: I came to HK because I needed a job. In London, I used to be a metal trader. It's difficult to trade metal with Japan. I thought I would go to Japan to find out why it's difficult, I ended up staying there for 3 years. I went back to England, then I met my girlfriend from Japan. Then I went back to Japan, after about some time, I found out it wasn't going to work with my girlfriend in Japan. Then I went back to England, I've got about a year doing nothing in England. When the job came, I needed it. The question is

will I do that again? Hopefully I would not be in such a difficult situation. Now I'm very happy with the outcome. It's been enjoyable. I'm being able to save a lot of money being single and living in Tuen Mun, it's easy. One of my NET friends living in Tuen Mun, he saved a million HK dollars in a few years because he didn't go anywhere. I don't mind spending money, even then I can save money. I can save money to do something else.

I: Living in an environment culturally different from yours, you will surely encounter some changes or differences. May I ask again in face of these changes or differences, normally what will your responses be?

J: I'll talk to the people. I can easily talk the way around. Like I walk here from Maclehose trail, it's a nice walk. I used to arrive here for a late breakfast. They have a crazy menu where they have different things on it. You have to choose from a, b, c only. Then I'll ask them if you have this, if you have that, and that, ok put them all together. You can always talk to people, do it nicely and you can get what you want. So now, I come here and I get the breakfast I want. If you are not happy with it, you can go somewhere else. I think I'm very loyal, if it gets good services, I always go to the same shop. I have a nice travel agency in Tuen Mun. They know who I am and if there are any problems, they'll help me solve them. You can always walk away if things are not working, for example if the restaurant is not doing what you want, you can go to the next one.

I: How about in your work?

J: That depends. Depends on how strongly I feel. If I feel it strongly, I'll say it out, but nicely; it depends, if it's real strong feeling, I'll keep going and talk with the principal. If it's not strong feelings, I think it's OK, you can do it your way, but I think it better to do it this way. From my experience, usually my ideas work, if they don't work, I'll accept it. The trust is mutual. I think we work in a team, we all know who get what strengths.

I: Do you make many friends, local and western?

J: I've got a very small circle of western friends, very tiny. I should get more. I had a HK girl friend for long time, we've sort of separated. Since we've broken up, I found it more lonely in the evening. Living in Tuen Mun, maybe a bit far away. I think when I was in Japan, I used to do a lot of going out. I think maybe my circle of friends maybe very small. I've some good colleagues to socialize with, they've invited me to China, and more will be good.

I: What else would you like to share with me about your experiences?

J: I guess no more.

I: Thank you so much for your sharing.

J: You're welcome.

## Samples of coding

6 February 2008

Interview with Nancy

(I: Ivory; N: Nancy)

I: Can you tell me what have driven you to HK?

N: I married to my husband in HK. → reason: marriage

I: How did you feel about living and working in HK?

N: I like HK, probably going to spend the rest of my life here. I think teaching is fun, but the working hour is very long and tiring, that is a very difficult thing, it's too busy in HK. → feeling: +ve, commitment

I: What're your expectations of HK before you came?

N: Before I came, I came on holidays three times before, so I kind of knew how HK was like before, but I didn't realize that working here is so demanding. → factor: +ve: teachy → fun  
→ factor: -ve: working hrs is long

I: How were your expectations different from your experiences?

N: I think the most difficult thing is working long hours, over 40 hrs per week because I also worked part-time as well. The cultural things are also different. For example meeting people and making friends are different. → factor: prior exp. & knowledge  
→ factor: inaccurate expectation  
→ culture shock  
→ difference: thinking

I: How?

N: (pause and think) Just general topics of conversations are not so open, people are more conservative here. For example, in a western country if you go somewhere you can just say hello to strangers, and you can talk to them and make a friend, so here if you talk to strangers, people will think you are weird. So, difficult to make friends. → diff: not open, conservative

I: Do you have a circle of local or western friends.

N: Most of my friends are not local, they are Asians, but they are not from HK, my best friend is Japanese, my other friend is Japanese. → support: friends, non-local

I: How do you come to make friends with them?

N: Through work.

I: You've been in HK for 2.5 years. What are the things you like best or dislike most about HK?

N: What I like most is the food, the lifestyle, everything is open late. After work, in Australia, if you went home, all the shops were closed, it's very quiet. There's always something you can do. And there are many different things you can see, the food, fashion, many things, many entertainments here. What I dislike most will be sometimes people are impolite. Maybe because I'm western, they cheat me a lot. If I go to a shop, they'll give me the wrong size, or try to charge me more money. I've learnt some of the prizes now, so I know if they're cheating me or not. That's the biggest thing I don't like. And I know because I'm a → daily life: +ve: food, lifestyle, service long hrs, many entertainments  
→ -ve: cheated wrong price, more money

foreigner.

I: What's it like working here?

N: At my work, my school and my colleagues are really nice. At my work, I feel comfortable. Everyone is lovely, the teachers treat me nicely, everyone is lovely. I heard that in other schools the NETs are often isolated. But I am lucky in my school, I got treated very nicely. But in general, when I go somewhere, I have to be very careful. Like the beauty saloon, or a shop, if I want to buy anything, I am very worried about the prize. I think sometimes they treat me differently, maybe they think I'm on holidays, that's why.

work: colleagues very nice.  
+ve

daily life:  
-ve = treat differently

I: Do you feel comfortable living in a local area like Lai Chi Kok?

N: Yes, I do actually, because I like Chinese culture. I love Chinese food.

Because my husband is Chinese, he's very Chinese (laugh). So I'm quite open to Chinese culture and I easily adapt.

attitude: love

attitude: open

I: Before you came, did you have any ideas of how Chinese culture was like?

N: Most of my best friends are Chinese in Australia, I've a lot of contact of Chinese culture.

prior knowledge:  
home friends are Chinese

I: Are the Chinese culture in HK similar to what you've experienced in Australia?

N: In some ways it's similar, maybe my friends are more westernized in Australia. They follow the western culture too. Here, it's very Chinese.

diff: Chinese friends more westernized in Australia  
HK very Chinese

I: Do you have any examples?

N: (Pause and think) Maybe the way of thinking. I notice that people here seldom openly express their feelings. If they're angry or if they're sad, they will not express their feelings. In western culture, if you're angry or if you're sad, you will tell them. So sometimes here it's difficult to read my friends' mind, I don't know what to say to them, and I don't know how they think about me. Sometimes in my work, no one says anything, they won't say I'm doing anything bad, they won't say I'm doing anything good. But I heard that if your boss doesn't complain then you're doing a good job, is that right? But in western culture, they will tell you you're doing a good job, they'll also tell you you're doing a bad job.

diff: way of thinking  
= less open  
= in daily life & work

I: Can you share with me more specifically about the changes or differences you have encountered ever since you come to live in HK?

N: The long working hour, maybe that is the major difference. Definitely the food, of course. I like Asian food better, I like the flavour.

diff: long working hrs  
-ve factor

I: Normally what your responses will be in face of the differences?

+ve factor = tasty food

N: Sometimes I feel frustrated or a bit lonely here. OK and sad, sometimes I miss the friendliness of my friends back in Australia, sometimes I feel a bit isolated, especially when I am treated badly.

feeling: frustrated, lonely, sad  
(-ve)  
isolated  
treated badly

I: You mean you have experiences of being treated badly here?

N: Many many times. Mainly if I asked for something and I asked for size small, they'd cheat me and give me a size large, or they'll charge me more money; maybe they have an advertisement, one day I went to a hair saloon and they sent me the bill, my Chinese friend translated to me, and

-ve = wrong size, wrong price

## **Open and Axial Coding**

**(for interview with Jacky)**

### **Axial Coding**

Motive for coming to HK - job

Positive things about living in HK

- Feelings about living in HK

-factors that help cross cultural adaptation

### **Open Coding**

-broken up with fiancée in Japan  
-saw an adv he got in Japan and applied for the job in HK

-like the local climate  
-like the wide selection of food  
-like the sort of entertainments (e.g. ruby and cricket contests, movies) that are cheap  
-upgraded his qualifications in HK  
-like the children he teach  
-enjoy watching the cricket contests  
-enjoy traveling from HK during holidays

-felt nervous when first came  
positive  
-like living in HK  
-found HK not that different to his home country  
-found the living environment acceptable  
-did not consider living in HK stressful  
-very happy with the outcome in HK  
-considered himself comfortably adapted to HK

### Prior cross cultural experience

-have lived and traveled to many different cultural environments  
-wouldn't experience culture shock -found himself easy to adapt as having lived in different cultural environments since a teenager

### Attitude

-ready to learn when going to different places

### Time

-realized time would help make adaptation easier

### Language environment

-found most local people in his living area speak some English

### NET friends

-found it helpful to have email contacts of other NETs

-found NET friends whom he knew through the email list more helpful practically and got their support and help

-have a small circle of friends here

### marital status

-being single is an advantage